

STUDENT RETENTION AT THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE:
MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS

by

Jill Jacobs-Biden

A dissertation/executive position paper submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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Student Retention in the Community College:
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by

Jill Jacobs-Biden

Approved: _____
Nancy W. Brickhouse, Ph.D.
Interim Director, School of Education

Approved: _____
Timothy K. Barnekov, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy

Approved: _____
Daniel Rich, Ph.D.
Provost

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed: _____

Barbara Curry, Ed.D.
(Professor in charge of dissertation (executive position paper))

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed: _____

James Broomall, Ed.D.
Member of dissertation committee (executive position paper)

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed: _____

Frances Leach, Ed.D.
Member of dissertation committee (executive position paper)

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standards required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed: _____

Eugene Matusov, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee (executive position paper)

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This manuscript is dedicated to:

My father, Donald C. Jacobs, for
always believing in me.

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ABSTRACT

This Executive Position Paper (EPP) studies student retention in the community college and Delaware Technical & Community College in particular. The paper focuses on four areas of students' needs: academic, psychological, social, and physical. An overview of the paper is given, and an introduction to Delaware Technical & Community College is presented. First, the nature of the pre-tech (developmental) population is discussed. Then, a literature review offers current research by experts in the field. In addition, the results from pre-tech students, faculty, and advisor surveys and interviews are analyzed. Statistical information underscores the problem of retaining students, and personal accounts from students provide insight as to why students drop out. Overall, problem areas are identified, and recommendations and solutions are offered and encouraged.

Introduction

Delaware Technical and Community College serves a highly diverse student body in terms of age, gender, race, and socio-economic status. The needs of the student population are often undeserved, resulting in a student drop-out rate of almost one third. This Executive Position Paper (EPP) will look at the needs of students in order to ensure a higher rate of student retention.

This dissertation will begin with an overview that presents the “face” of the community college classroom. It will progress to a historical perspective of community colleges, in general, and then focus on the history of Delaware Tech, specifically. Paper I provides a literature review for the area of student retention. Four areas of interest are studied: academic, social, psychological, and physical. This section examines current opinions and thought in regard to student retention in the community college. Paper II, the methodology section, includes interviews with faculty and students; student, faculty, and advisor surveys; and other colleges’ retention plans. In addition, statistics are presented for student retention rates at Delaware Tech from 2002 to the present. Finally, an interview with student retention expert Dr. Vincent Tinto is included. Paper III discusses solutions and recommendations to the problem of student retention at Delaware Technical & Community College. It offers a reflection of the information and statistics gathered. Most suggestions are practical but need the full support of faculty, staff and, most importantly, administration.

In addressing the question of student retention, a general question with four specific parts will be considered:

What steps can Delaware Tech take to improve student retention?

- a. What can be done to address academic needs?
- b. What can be done to address psychological needs?
- c. What can be done to address social needs?
- d. What can be done to address physical needs?

Overview

The community college classroom is unlike any other classroom in America. Diversity, rather than homogeneity, is the norm. In an average-sized class of twenty students at Delaware Tech, for example, most of the seats will be filled with young students who have just graduated from high school. The majority of these will be female. At least five seats will be filled with middle-aged men and women who have lost their jobs due to downsizing and/or outsourcing. One or two seats will be filled with students who have graduated from a GED program. Some seats will hold older women whose children have just entered college – now these women are taking the opportunity to earn college degrees themselves. Three quarters of the class will be Caucasian; one quarter of the class will be African American; one seat will hold a Latino; and the remaining seats will be filled with students of Asian descent or non-resident aliens. At least one quarter of the students will have children – most of them will be single mothers. Some will be the first in their families to attend college. Few will have taken honors courses in high school, while many will have taken remedial courses, special education, or vocational training. Almost two-thirds will be part-time students, with the remaining one-third attending college on a full-time basis. The socio-economic status will range from middle to lower class with approximately 67 percent receiving financial aid. Although there is strength in diversity as a classroom component, the lack of homogeneity in academic ability makes it difficult to teach to a single standard. In addition to academic concerns,

the social, emotional, and physical needs of the community college student offer their own unique challenges. As a result, due to the diversity of the student population, student retention is a major problem faced by the community college.

The diverse nature of the students dictates that the original mission of the community college changes as the nature of the community college metamorphoses into the institution it is today. Having evolved from the junior college, the community college expanded to meet the socio-economic needs of the generations following World War II. Beginning in the 1950s, the ideals of equal opportunity and fulfilling the American Dream were made possible through the establishment of the community college. In response to the needs of the community and to the growing number of adult learners, the community college became a multi-faceted, divergent institution. Today, the community college not only answers the needs of transfer students but has also emerged to address the needs of career education, vocational and technical education, contract training, and community services.

Delaware Technical and Community College (DTCC), founded to meet the needs of students, businesses, and the corporate community, reinforces the goals of a community college in its mission statement:

Delaware Technical and Community College is a statewide multi-campus community college committed to providing open admission, postsecondary education. The college offers comprehensive educational opportunities including career, general, developmental, and transfer education, lifelong learning, and workforce training. The College is committed to the advancement of teaching and technology, student development, and community service. The College

believes in the practical value of higher education as a means of economic and personal advancement. The College promotes diversity and multi cultural and global awareness. The College respects and cares for students as individuals and maintains a friendly and open institution which welcomes all students and supports their aspirations for a better life. (*Delaware Tech College Catalog, 2005-2007, p. 2*)

Responding to the current social and economic morés of the new millennium, Delaware Tech's mission has adapted to meet the needs and goals of today's students.

As a community college, Delaware Tech mirrors the national profile of a community college. Last year, in the fall of 2005 at Delaware Tech Stanton Campus, more students were taking courses for credit than for non-credit, but the number of non-credit students is increasing. Ninety percent of all students were in-state students. Delaware Tech is the largest educator of minorities and women in the state of Delaware, and one out of every six Delawareans has taken a course at the College, equaling a total of 130,000 students since its inception. Over half (55 percent) of the students are enrolled at the Stanton and Wilmington campuses; the remaining students attend the Dover or Georgetown campus (Miller, speech, August 15, 2006).

Delaware Tech is still expanding to meet the needs of students and community in the tri-state area. For example, as healthcare needs become more critical, Delaware Tech plans to respond to those needs through expanding the healthcare programs currently offered. Within the next year, Delaware Tech plans to break ground to build a new biotech facility to address the growing number of students entering the fields of nursing and allied health. In addition to programs being developed on campus, off campus programs

are expanding as well. The Corporate and Community Program Division answers the needs of many corporations in the community such as DuPont, General Motors, Avon, Amtrak, and others by giving seminars, offering instruction, and supplying training. As a large institution in a small state, Delaware Tech is depended upon to answer the corporate, educational, and technology needs for the state of Delaware.

Admission to the College is open to all Delaware residents who have a high school education or its equivalent or to anyone who is eighteen years of age or older and able to benefit from instruction. The philosophy of Delaware Tech states that it was created to provide an open door, comprehensive program of education and training beyond the high school level. Through education, Delaware Tech seeks to help students in reaching their potential and increasing their wage earning capacity. As a result, “over 100 degree, diploma, and certificate programs are offered in a variety of technical areas” (*Delaware Tech College Catalog, 2005-2007, p. 2*). The focus of the college is to develop curricula that match career opportunities in industry, government, and business.

Delaware Tech also offers a fully accredited academic course load for those students who wish to transfer to four year colleges. To that end, the College has articulation agreements with The University of Delaware and Delaware State University in specific technology programs, which enable students to transfer into the third year of programs if students earn the required grade point average. Weekday, evening, and Saturday courses are offered for students to enrich their knowledge, expand their skills, and complete their degrees. Although Delaware Tech offers an “open door” admissions policy, which states that students must have only a high school degree or its equivalent and be eighteen years of age, open door does not mean open curricula. If students do not

meet the entrance requirements of degree courses, a developmental program is in place to help students remediate their skills prior to their being accepted into degree programs.

The unique nature of the classroom allows for a complexity of problems as well. Almost all community college students work, either full or part-time, while attending school. In addition, many students, with or without a partner, are raising children or caring for elderly parents. The responsibilities of attending school, working, and raising children can sometimes be overwhelming and, most times, stressful. Community college students, often from lower socio-economic backgrounds, often seek a degree to earn more money in the workforce. The goals of many of these students are tied to their earning power; a two-year degree means an hourly wage increase or a promotion in their present employment. A four-year degree, a distant dream to many, ensures a stable career, higher social status, and financial security.

The open door policy at Delaware Tech ensures that all students can pursue the American Dream of attaining a college education. The placement test (CPT) places students into classes where they can achieve success – whether it is basic level, pre-tech level, or regular college credit level courses. In addition to computer and writing labs, tutoring is available through all academic departments. Yet, with all these services offered, the needs of the student population are underserved. Nationally, students drop out of community college at approximately 33 percent; similarly, at Delaware Tech, two-thirds of the students are “maintained” (*Fact Book*, 2001, Section VII). Delaware Tech counts and records statistics for students who are degree seeking candidates, whether it be to attain a certificate, a diploma, or an associate’s degree. Delaware Tech has reported cohorts for first-time students for the past five years, and the “long term follow up of

each cohort is very illustrative of what becomes of students in each entering class. Our students ‘stop out’ rather than drop out, some being full-time for a semester and part-time for several more semesters, etc. We know that over a period of about six years, that about 20% of our students will have completed a program” (*Fact Book*, 2001, Section VII).

History of the Community College

The community college has gradually evolved into the academic institution that it is today. The community college found its roots early in the twentieth century as a reaction to the social change occurring at the time:

Among the social forces that contributed to its rise, most prominent were the need for workers trained to operate the nation’s expanding industries; the lengthened period of adolescence, which mandated custodial care for the young for a longer time; and the drive for social equality, which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education. (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 1)

As the nation grew and America became more industrialized, a growing number of Americans sought upward social mobility through educational institutions. At this point, America’s universities were unaffordable for the average American. Then, though, “the federal government stepped in, funding a series of state universities through federal land grants” (Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1995, p. 3).

At the same time, an evolution was occurring in higher education. “Several prominent nineteenth and early twentieth century educators wanted the universities to abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and relegate the function of teaching adolescents to a new set of institutions to be called junior colleges” (Cohen & Brawer,

2003, p. 6). Others wanted the universities to offer education primarily to the elite upper class. “These elitists viewed the university as a place of scholarship, research, and specialization” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 7). The idea of creating or dedicating the freshman and sophomore years to preparing for university-end study appealed to several university presidents and educators throughout the United States. Several of those proponents included Charles Eliot of Harvard University; William Rainey of University of Chicago; Charles A. Joy and John Burgess of Columbia College; R.H. Jesse of the University of Missouri; and Edmund James of the University of Illinois, as well as The United States Commission of Education, Henry Barnard (Witt et al., 1995, pp. 10-11).

With this controversy, a schism was taking place in the academic community. Although the two-year college as we know it today had yet to come into its own, the confluence of a grassroots populist movement supporting educational opportunity and an elitist movement supporting the university as a place for the intellectually gifted gave rise to the notion of the two year college (Witt et al., 1995, pp. 4-5). As Brubacher (1977) succinctly stated, “Higher education replaced the western frontier as the land of opportunity for American youth, especially minorities” (pp. 70-71). Witt et al. (1995) credits William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, as the forefather of the two year college. Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, “in 1892, Harper demanded the upper and lower divisions of the University of Chicago” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 14); the lower level was a precursor of two years of pre-college work. A few years later, “in 1895, Harper coined a new name for the lower division departments: he called them junior colleges . . .” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 14). Not all universities followed suit. Many universities and colleges did not eliminate the freshman and sophomore

years, so “the community college remained adjunctive well into the middle of the [twentieth] century” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 7).

But after the turn of the century, the number of junior colleges started to increase. “In 1901, Joliet Junior College [Illinois] opened its doors, with much fanfare, as the country’s self proclaimed first independent public junior college” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 25). Koos (1924) reported 20 [junior colleges] in 1909 and 170 ten years later (cited in Cohen and Brawer, 2003, p. 13). Ratcliffe (1994) reports the impetus for the development of the junior college:

The first great growth period of junior colleges occurred from 1910 to 1920 coinciding with the growth of kindergartens and junior high schools. In many school districts, the construction of a new junior high school was necessary to relieve the overcrowding in the existing high schools and elementary schools. However, once the junior high was constructed, the four-year high schools became three-year high schools. There was physical space to permit the operation of a junior college. (p. 8)

The restructuring of secondary education, along with the innovative plan of university presidents, coincided to form the basis of the junior college. The junior college also emerged from normal schools (i.e., teacher education), vocational schools, and technical schools. Thus, early in the 1920s through to the 1930s, junior colleges played a significant role in post-secondary education. “At the second annual meeting of The American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) in 1922, the junior college was defined as an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade” (Gleazer, 1994, p. 17).

After the rapid growth of junior colleges in 1920s, the expansion of education was adversely affected by the Great Depression beginning in 1929. University enrollment declined; “public, junior college enrollment, on the other hand, steadily increased” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 96). “In the year before the market crash, American junior colleges had graduated only 3,253 students” (Witt et. al., 2005, p. 96), but these numbers were to increase greatly: “Three years later the graduating class numbered 14,000” (Witt et al., 2005, p. 96). The focus of the junior college student was on obtaining a job. As the junior college moved away from liberal arts courses and focused on vocational and technical education, students began to see the junior college as a place to ensure job security. With a new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Americans were offered the New Deal, and thousands of dollars were put into federal emergency junior college funds (Witt et al., 1995, pp. 96-97).

Throughout the 1920s, the debate regarding the focus of junior college continued to rage. The three prominent leaders of the junior college movement—George Zook, Doak Campbell, and Walter Eells—came together to form a consensus regarding the role of the junior college. In 1920 in St. Louis, Missouri, they, and others, established the American Association of Junior College (AAJC), which “provided an organizational center whose goal was to shape the emerging institution of community colleges and, in turn, to shape the destinies of those who would attend them” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 33). Many of the issues faced then are the same as those currently faced by the community colleges: which institutions will accept transfer credits and whether community colleges are basically vocational or academic institutions. Like today, students were looking for social mobility through education. In the 1920s and 1930s,

universities and four-year colleges were struggling with the quality of education offered, and junior colleges were often viewed as inferior.

Then in the late 1930s, the term “junior college” eventually became “community college.” B.S. Hollinshead, president of a junior college in Pennsylvania, wrote that “the junior college should be a community college meeting community needs” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 20). Dr. George F. Zook, president of the American Council on Education in 1946, echoed Hollinshead’s sentiments by expounding on the idea that “junior colleges need to take responsibility for educational leadership in the community” (Gleazer, 1994, p. 18).

The 1940s brought about the greatest changes in the acceptance and growth of the community college. Two major events influenced the positive direction of the community college: The Truman Commission on Higher Education “popularized the term community college, and its findings led to the massive expansion of comprehensive community college that took place in the 1950s and 1960s” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 87), and the early proponents of the community college, “Koos, Cambell, Ellis, and Zook, pushed for comprehensive junior colleges that would meet the diverse needs of the American population” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 87).

When World War II ended in 1945, thousands of soldiers came home ready to build better lives. Junior colleges, which had seen declining enrollments, would now experience a boost from the soldiers returning home from the war. The GI Bill of Rights, created by Roosevelt and passed by Congress in 1944, allowed for all veterans who had served for 90 days or were injured in the war to receive a free education (Witt et al., 1995, pp. 125-126). Soon, college enrollments were on the rise. The opportunity for a

college education, which previously could be afforded by only the upper class, was now a reality for thousands of men and women returning home from World War II. “Junior college enrollment nearly doubled in three years, from 251,290 in 1944, to half a million in the 1947 academic year” (Witt et al., 1995, p. 128).

In a few short months, the junior college adapted – much like it does today – to the needs of its students. Returning servicemen and women needed to fill in gaps of basic skills, wanted academic as well as vocational programs, and required financial aid and housing while attending school. After Roosevelt’s death, Truman, as the next president, created the Truman Commission. The Truman Commission emphasis on vocational and community-based education provided the conceptual foundation for the community college (Eaton, 1994, p. 29). The leaders of the community college viewed education as the following:

None of these leaders of the junior college favored an exclusively vocational curriculum. Although the leaders of the junior college viewed it as a separate entity whose students occupied their own niche in society, “intended for lite work,” they did not totally eliminate general education courses or the option of transferring to a four year college or university. (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 36)

The 1950s brought expansive growth to the community college. In an effort to obtain upward mobility, returning GIs, took the opportunity to enroll in college. Through the GI Bill, returning soldiers were able to finance a college education, a dream which had previously been afforded by the higher classes of society. Students enrolled in record numbers. Community colleges became a “neighborhood institution,” as “more than any other single factor, access depends on proximity” (Cohen & Brawer, 1989, p. 87).

The number of community colleges steadily increased until the growth of the community college leveled off in the 1970s. “By 1963, public and private two year head-count enrollment stood at 850,361. By 1980, enrollment had grown to 4,526,287 . . . approximately a 230 percent increase in student attendance” (Eaton, 1994, p. 30). It was during this time that Delaware Tech developed its roots:

The Delaware General Assembly created Delaware Technical and Community College in 1966, when it approved House Bill 529, signed into law by then Governor Charles L. Terry, Jr. A Board of Trustees was appointed to oversee development of the statewide institution. The Board Chairman was E. Hall Downes; members were William A. Carter, Edward W. Comings, William C. Kay, Clement J. Lemon, John H. Long, and Charles L. Simms.

The studies and reports of the original board were used to create the Southern Campus, which opened in September 1967, near Georgetown in Sussex County, with 367 students enrolled. The name was changed to the Jack F. Owens Campus in May 1995. A temporary Northern Campus opened in New Castle County in 1968. The Northern location was replaced by two campuses – Stanton in the fall of 1973 and Wilmington in the spring of 1974. The Terry Campus opened in 1972 north of the City of Dover.

The President’s Office, located adjacent to the Terry Campus, functions as a central office by providing a variety of services in support of the campuses. Delaware Tech’s enrollment has grown dramatically in recent years. Students of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life have benefited from the training and

education that is provided. It is estimated that one-fourth of Delaware's population has taken courses at Delaware Tech during its short history.

(Delaware Tech College Catalog, 2005-2007, p. 2)

Introduction to Pre-Tech Students

At Delaware Tech, the term “pre-tech” is synonymous with developmental learners. These learners are most often defined as lacking in basic educational skills, possessing low IQ levels, lacking study skills, and/or possibly learning disabled. With a policy of open admission, the community college has had no choice but to include developmental programs to meet the needs of their students. Boylan, Bonham, Claxton & Bliss (1992) found that for community college, “74% of first time college students required a developmental education” (cited in Crews, 2004). The percentages have continued to increase. At Delaware Tech, the numbers of students in pre-tech classes substantiate the increasing percentages. In the past year (Fall 2005-Spring 2006), the numbers of developmental classes versus the number of regular college level classes were as follows:

Basic Courses:

Basic Writing	7	Fall
	<u>3</u>	Spring
	10	Total
Basic Reading	9	Fall
	<u>4</u>	Spring
	13	Total

Pre-Tech Courses:

Pre-Tech Writing	23	Fall
	<u>16</u>	Spring
	39	Total

Pre-Tech Reading	22	Fall
	<u>14</u>	Spring
	36	Total
Pre-Tech Review	2	Fall
	<u>2</u>	Spring
	4	Total
College-Credit Classes:		
Composition	35	Fall
	<u>33</u>	Spring
	68	Total
Technical Writing	23	Fall
	<u>23</u>	Spring
	46	Total
Oral Communication	5	Fall
	<u>5</u>	Spring
	10	Total
Critical Reading	26	Fall
	<u>22</u>	Spring
	48	Total
Additional Classes:		
Honors Comp	1	Fall
Black Amer. Literature	1	Fall
	1	Spring
Business Communications	1	Spring
Honors Technical Writing	1	Fall

The number of developmental sections totals 102; the number of college level sections equals 177. The percentage of developmental classes mirrors the general research at 71.3 percent of total classes offered.

Developmental education is a major component of the community college curriculum. “If, as Roueche (1968) points out, developmental students are admitted to institutions of higher education with little hope of success, then the open door policy of many institutions becomes ‘a revolving door policy’” (Hardin, 1988). The logical conclusion is that high schools are graduating students who are ill prepared for the rigors of college. Yet the problem is much more complex than that. Many community college students were not enrolled in college preparatory programs in high schools; many come from vocational educational programs for which community college is a logical step. Many are older students who have returned to school after having children or changing careers and are seeking upward mobility. Others may have dropped out of high school. The reasons are numerous, yet the gaps in education are pervasive. The State of Delaware is small enough that for students who are matriculating from high school to Delaware Tech, the transition should be almost effortless. A concerted effort should have occurred years ago to prepare low achieving students for community college programs. Yet, too often, they struggle and fail.

One small change that could be made in regard to the high school English curriculum would be to switch the research paper format from MLA format to APA format. Vocational schools should require that papers be written in a format based on science and technology; instead, the vocational school teach students to write their papers in MLA format, a format based on language and the arts. This conversion offers a small change but a major hurdle for students to overcome. This example is one of many that portrays how public education puts community college students at a disadvantage –

cohesive, transitional efforts should be made by both the high schools and Delaware Tech to close the gaps and create a bridge to higher education.

In other instances, students who return to school after extended periods of time often have gaps in their learning. At Delaware Tech, the average age of students is 28 years old. Most students who enter as adult learners have not written papers, studied for exams, or read textbooks for over a decade. Many have forgotten, for example, how to find the main idea, solve an equation, or think about the relevance of what they are reading in a textbook. Because of these deficiencies in learning, these students must refresh their skills or fill in the gaps of skills they never learned. Thus, they, too, join the pool of developmental learners.

Other students who have been labeled as learning disabled or have taken special education classes cannot compete in college-level classes. They are placed in basic or pre-tech classes until they can achieve grades that will designate them as ready to undertake college level classes. Many times, however, these students cannot compete due to low intelligence levels, lack of study skills, and lack of basic skills. Community colleges offer a myriad of support through tutors, computer remedial programs, reading specialists, and mentoring. For this student, though, remediation is not always the answer. The hard truth for this student is that he/she cannot intellectually compete at the college level.

Another type of developmental learner is the high school dropout who has succeeded in achieving a GED (Graduate Equivalency Degree) and decided to continue his/her education. Many times, truancy, pregnancy, or family problems have been the reason for dropping out of high school. Yet, a desire for greater financial security

motivates these students to further their education. Although these students may not be impaired because of a lack of intelligence, they often have gaps in their learning or have forgotten much of the knowledge they learned in high school.

Finally, Hardin (1988) describes the “ignored student” who is overlooked due to academic or physical problems. These students are developmental because they “expend a great deal of energy becoming anonymous” (Hardin, 1998). These students may lack social skills and try to make themselves anonymous within the walls of the classroom. Often, this desire for anonymity does not change even as the student enters the college classroom. “In addition, the ignored’s passive involvement in classes often allows physical problems to go undetected” (Hardin, 1988). For example, adult students may not realize that they have physical problems such as ADHD, hearing problems, or visual problems. The teacher, in effect, is often the first one to notice that the student is inattentive or squinting or asking a question about material that has just been discussed. It then becomes the responsibility of the instructor to direct a student to the school psychologist or nurse.

Today, developmental education remains a large part of the curriculum in the community college. No other post secondary institution offers as much remediation of basic skills in both math and English. The CPT (College Placement Test) at Delaware Tech seeks to place students at the appropriate levels to ensure success rather than to build in failure. The English component of the test is made up of a reading section and a sentence skills section. If students score in the 28-50 percent, they are placed in Basic Reading; if students score in the 51-77 percentile, they are placed in Pre-Tech Reading. The sentence skills section determines the level of writing skill that students have

achieved. If students score in the 30-53 percentile, they are placed in Basic Writing; if they score in the 54-86 percentile, they are placed into Pre-Tech Writing. A greater percentage of students test into pre-tech classes than into basic classes; many pre-tech students have the ability to remediate their deficiencies and progress to college level courses and finally, to graduation. Few basic students have the perseverance or the ability to progress through pre-tech to college level and to graduation. Yet, “research has continually demonstrated that developmental education students do as well as, if not better, than nondevelopmental students in college level courses” (McCabe & Day, 1998, p. 41).

Paper I: Literature Review

1. Academic Issues

Academic success is critical to student retention. Nationally, half of the freshman students do not return for a second year (Community College Survey, 2005).

Unfortunately, even before the school year begins, “institutions must be innovative, creative and clear in their approach to retain students, not to mention setting measurable goals” (Brotherton, 2001). A comprehensive approach includes a combination of strategies: development of learning communities, support services which include tutors and mentors, an accessible Writing Center, and a critical skills focus for the underprepared. Focus on retention begins the moment the student signs up for classes, and mandatory orientation should be a part of every first year student’s experience.

“Institutional data suggest the value of orientation and student success courses which equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college” (McClenney & Waiwaiole, 2005). If students feel closely aligned with their institutions, even before school begins, the chances of student retention increase dramatically. Cohen and Brawer (2003) expressed the importance of college orientation:

An ideal orientation program is a sustained and coordinated effort, fully supported by the entire campus community, based on sound concepts of student development and knowledge of how much college environments influence students, inclusive of many different resources an intervention, timed and ordered in an organized fashion, evaluated for its effectiveness and influence, and coordinated by a central department or chair. (p. 206)

In order to increase student retention rates, colleges and universities today may need to look at how they continue to accommodate students. All aspects of the college experience must be examined in order to determine measurable objectives. “Because orientation sessions can either be encouraging and personal or distant and bureaucratic, college personnel recognize the importance that orientation plays in helping to retain their new students and keep them enrolled” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 206)

Orientation

To accommodate the constraints on a student’s time, orientation could be revolving and offered during the day or at night, on weekends, or online. “Overall, though, on-line or in person, orientation programs are most effective when they are well planned, semester-long involvements” (Cohen & Brawer, 2006, p. 207). The purpose of orientation is to address student concerns, to promote success in attaining their educational goals, to encourage meeting with other students, and to encourage students to closely align themselves with faculty and staff. The advantage of the student/faculty relationship is early identification of students who are underprepared and need extra help in order to succeed in college. These students could be enrolled in mini-courses of a few days’ duration to help “brush up” on their skills before school even begins. Early identification would also assist in pairing students with tutors/mentors and advisors/counselors.

Advisement

Another suggestion to increase student retention would include assigning an advisor/counselor to each student. Because it is the next step in aligning students with their institutions, advisement is crucial. Therefore, advisors should make an effort to

meet with all incoming freshmen. Cohen and Brawer (2003) discussed the importance of advisement:

As the key element in student development, counseling must be integrated with other campus activities, helping students to reach their potential, focusing on educational, personal, social, and vocational development, and, being student centered, taking into account students' interests, aptitudes, needs, values and potential. (p. 202)

Often, the focus of the advisor is scheduling students into classes, but the relationship needs to be taken to the next level. In order to increase retention, advisors must exhibit a personal interest in their advisees. Creating this connection takes much time and effort. The amount of diversity among the student populations make this more complicated. “Brillant (2000), for example, argues that counselors need to spend time with their students, listen to their stories, and pay particular attention to their life histories” (Ryan, 2003). Unfortunately, many students today do not feel connected to their counselors.

The relationship between student persistence and academic advising is paramount. Noel-Levitz, a nationally known student retention organization, suggests providing a planning model that “provides a comprehensive and systematic way to address the key components that are associated with the successful delivery and organization of advising services in colleges and universities” (Bryant & Crockett, 2005, p. 238-B). Noel-Levitz advises colleges to look at their mission and practices and assess whether advisors are meeting student's needs on a constant and continual basis. Bryant and Crockett (2005) argues that the job of an advisor does not end when student signs up for classes – the advisor should be connected to students until the day they graduate (p. 3-D).

One community college that has aggressively addressed advisement is the Bronx Community College in New York. The faculty there created a proactive program to retain more students. At The College Board 9th Annual Community College Showcase in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on November 14, 2002, representatives from the college, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Director of Student Academic Affairs, and the Director of Counseling, explained several strategies for revising/enhancing advisement of their students:

1. Coordinated with other outreach efforts – a team approach was implemented whereby faculty and advisors collaborated to help students assess their needs and to provide the necessary services.
2. Developed and maintained databases of students – counselors kept track of students who were on academic probation, have stopped out, or have dropped out.
3. Outreached to students who have ‘stopped out’ through phone calls, emails, and follow up letters – counselors kept in contact with students until they were ready to return to school. The outreach program was proactive, rather than reactive.
4. Matched intervention with student needs – counselors matched students with financial aid officers, provided scholarship information, assisted with securing tutors, helped to find daycare or provided career counseling. Counselors sought to find solutions for all student problems.

In addition, for students who were not doing well in their coursework, alternative plans were discussed with students. This program, Choices, was created to help students with

better career choices in areas where they could succeed. At the Community College Showcase, the college representatives reported that to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts, they measured outcomes showing that they had increased and accelerated graduation rates. Greater student satisfaction was measured with a survey that showed that 61.7 percent were satisfied with their advisement. More students advanced to four year schools, and the number of students increased from 6,800 to 7,300. Clearly, Bronx Community College was successful in its efforts to retain more students.

Another example of a successful community college student retention program exists at General College at the University of Minnesota. The mission of the General College is to prepare students to transfer to a degree granting program at the University of Minnesota (Brotherton, 2001). “ ‘Intrusive’ advising is a key component of the program . . . students must meet with their advisor before registering for courses, which has proven to decrease the number of course withdrawals” (Brotherton, 2001). The faculty, staff and advisors all work together to ensure a higher rate of student retention.

Other community colleges have instituted successful student retention initiatives. In the 2005 Community College Student Survey of Student Engagement, several community colleges were cited for excellence in developing student retention programs. La Guardia Community College (NY), for example, developed an electronic portfolio initiative, which “provides students with a tool for collecting their academic work and their reflections on their learning as well as for sharing their portfolios on the Internet” (Community College Survey, 2005). Another college cited was The Community and Technical College at WVU Tech (WV), which helped build student organizations to help students to feel aligned with their school. “Partially as a result of these efforts, The

College produced the highest retention and graduation rates of all community colleges in the state” (Community College Survey, 2005). Many more examples of successful programs were cited. Noel-Levitz provides a list of successful community college programs as does Met-Life Foundation. If a community college seeks to be successful in student retention, several types of model programs are available as examples.

Mentoring

A faculty mentoring program can go hand-in-hand with the advisement process. Many faculty already feel that informal mentoring of students is part of their jobs – that mentoring is a natural component in the job of teaching students and helping them to achieve success. The academic success of college students is often dependent on their “integration” into a college campus; one way to achieve this integration is through a mentoring program (Pope, 2002). In one study, Yale psychiatrist Daniel J. Levinson found that men who were successful in life all had three aspects in common: they had a vision of what they wanted to achieve, they made friendships with people who could emotionally support them, and they sought a mentor to help guide them to success (Gardner & Jewler, 2004, p. 72).

The best mentors are the faculty or staff with whom a student seems to connect. The association should be spontaneous, not assigned. The mentor should be genuinely interested in helping the students succeed or meet their goals. Mentoring should be multi-dimensional, meaning that it should address the academic, personal, and professional needs of the students (Pope, 2002). Not all students allow themselves to trust faculty or staff. The students are sometimes unable to remove themselves from the teacher/student construct; some students cannot accept the teacher in a role of mentor

because they always see teachers as figures of authority. In general, the more interaction students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and persist toward achievement of their educational goals (*Student-Faculty Interaction, 2004*).

Student/faculty interaction creates confidence in the student, thus encouraging them to persist in reaching their goals.

Mentoring/Ethnic Groups

Ethnic groups face a host of problems that often lead to an increase in the student drop-out rate. The populations of African, Middle Eastern, Hispanic, and Native Americans are increasing within the community college. The National Center of Educational Statistics (1999), reported that “42.3 percent of African Americans in higher education are in the community college system, along with 50% of the Native American and 55.6% of Hispanic enrollment” (Pope, 2002). Many students do not feel comfortable at their community colleges because of the lack of diversity either in the student population or in the make-up of the faculty, which creates a feeling of alienation. A lack of English as a Second Language (ESL) support could also hinder student success. Moreover, many minority students lack basic skills such as identifying the main idea and supporting statements, identifying parts of speech or using punctuation correctly; thus, they are placed in remedial courses. To address their needs, “some institutions have developed alternative programs that assist minority students who have conflicts in connecting with mentors in order to achieve the career-related and psychosocial guidance needed to survive and be successful in college” (Pope, 2002). Minority students have had particular success with mentoring programs. Gardner and Jewler (2003) found that “the most effective programs for first year students, particularly for minority students, provide

a family-like social and academic support system” (p. 135), which may be either faculty or staff.

Like minority students, first generation students also encounter obstacles to succeeding in college. “They have transitional needs not generally met by traditional support services and often find themselves in academic limbo” (Folger, 2004). They, too, should be paired with faculty members as mentors, or at the very least, paired with peer tutors who have survived a year of college. Astin (1996) found that “the strongest single source of influence on the development of the student is the student’s peer group” (cited in Folger, 2004). Therefore, a mentor in the student’s cohort could be particularly helpful in teaching and promoting success.

Study Skills

Good advisement and peer/faculty mentoring are positive strategies for helping the community college student, yet one of the most important tools for achieving success is a solid foundation of the basic skills. Underprepared students must seek to develop or practice study skills. “Skill development, like any other kind of deep learning, takes time and practice” (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2003, p. 312). Many of the first year college students are lacking basic skills and effective learning strategies. Often, students are placed into study skills courses, but they have difficulty in transferring their knowledge to subject area courses. For example, students may be taught how to find a main idea, but when reading a psychology textbook, they fail to grasp the main ideas of paragraphs or chapters. As a result, “institutions are increasingly turning to what is referred to as ‘integrated academic enrichment’” (Tinto, 1993, p. 183). Students who have a lack of academic preparation should be taught how to apply study skills to all

major subject areas, not just English; study skills should be incorporated across the curriculum, not solely in segregated remedial courses. “Of course, the success of all such programs ultimately hinges upon the skills of the instructors who teach at-risk students” (Tinto, 1993, p. 184). And, not all content area teachers are willing to teach skills that they assume college students should already possess.

The *No Child Left Behind* program has sought to remedy the lack of college preparedness by holding graduates to certain standards. National graduation requirements have become more consistent, but that does not guarantee a student’s preparedness for college. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2001), “Faculty who teach first-year students are often shocked to learn, for example, that more than half reported spending less than four hours per week on homework in high school” (Upcroft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2003, p. 243). Community college students find that they have even less time to study as they are often working full-time, attending college full or part-time, and may also be supporting a family. “It is likely that most students can succeed in the collegiate and occupational programs if they are required to supplement their courses with tutorials, learning labs, special counseling, peer-group assistance, and a variety of other aids” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 277).

Writing Skills

Research has proven that “55 percent of the companies surveyed were dissatisfied with their employees’ written communication skills” (Crews, 2004). A developmental writing program is necessary for most students who enter the community college, but students are most successful when they take a basic skills writing course during the initial semester of college experience (Crews, 2004). The ability to write clearly and coherently

is “the hallmark of an educated person,” yet “recent data from The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and other groups depict nothing less than a writing crisis in the nation’s classrooms” (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2004). The answer is to expand writing across the curriculum, not just in English classes. Teachers, instructors and professors at the high school and community college levels need to use more essay tests instead of the Scantron test format. In grading research papers, a writing format assessment should be part of the final grade – not just an assessment of content material. But again, the faculty and administration need to be committed to such a project. Faculty in the Writing Center can assist and offer support, but the entire faculty has to acknowledge the value of good writing and incorporate good writing practices and expectations into their curricula. Effective writing and communication has major importance not only in academic arena, but more importantly, in the workplace.

Social Issues

Most retention experts agree on the importance of aligning students with their institutions. “Alignment” involves creating a positive atmosphere where students can achieve their goals and feel connected with their colleges and universities. “Research has found that two things correlate to retention: The first is making friends with other students and the second is combining the friendship formation process with academic work” (Berg, 2004). Colleges have worked hard to help students find connections with other students, faculty, and staff. The University of Kansas, for example, sought to find connections for minority students through HAWK, a student retention program named after the Jayhawks basketball team. “For Alisa Lewis, a junior from East St. Louis, Ill., . . . the HAWK link students and staff have become like extended family. ‘HAWK Link

made me feel like I was part of something, and you feel like you are a part of something. You have reasons to stay,' she says" (Fields, 2002).

Although students make friends through their classes and their technologies, it is often difficult for community college students to socialize during hours outside of classes. Children and work must take precedence over socializing with friends and school activities. "In general, though, few colleges have developed programs in which sizable percentages of students participate (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 9). Yet, college students do spend time socializing within the confines of the college. Students form study groups in the library, cafeteria, or various areas throughout the college.

Socialization, though, does not always have to include public lectures, theater, arts, or sports. A more compelling reason for students to form friendships is to find ways to engage in learning. Colleges and universities need to find ways to promote student involvement in learning. Research in adult education promotes the idea that adult students learn best when involved in collaborative learning. "Through collaboration with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them with the kinds of situations and problems that they will encounter in the workplace, the community, and their personal lives" (*Active and Collaborative*, 2005). Tinto (2003) has long stressed the importance of learning communities formed by grouping first year students into classes together to form a support system of cooperative and collaborative learning. "It should be pointed out here that such programs, whether collaborative or cooperative, are particularly important to nonresidential institutions and to committing students whose attachments to the campus may be weak" (Tinto, 2003, p. 169).

Learning communities promote interaction as students are grouped into several classes together according to abilities and subject areas. Cabrera (2002) stated that “the vitality of the classroom experience has regained recognition as one of the most effective factors influencing college students’ cognitive, motivational, and affective development.” Research has shown that the best way to teach adults is through collaborative learning with either faculty and students or students with students. “Learning communities help students establish academic and social support networks outside the classroom” (Cabrera, 2002). These networks are important for the first year student, and in particular, the first generation college freshman. Folger (2004) noted that “they need assistance in developing relationships with other learners and the university setting; they need assistance in developing a strong sense of their academic selves.” Socialization is an important part of the human experience; it is particularly important in an educational setting. The goal of the community college education is creating success through persistence, aligning students with their institutions and connecting them with the shared goals of other students.

Psychological Issues

Creating success is the number one priority for community college students. Success can be attained through creating a workable orientation program, offering mentoring to help support those in need, establishing learning communities, and promoting collaborative learning. Students in regular college level classes benefit from these efforts, but first year, first generation, and at-risk students reap even greater benefits. Students with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities must also be considered. “Institutional responsibility should facilitate the collaboration of universities

(faculty, administration, students) to provide outreach and support aimed at meeting the disability accommodation needs of students with physical, psychological, learning and attentional disabilities” (Graham-Smith, 2004). Usually, children are diagnosed with learning disabilities in elementary school and school staffs work with those individuals and their doctor as they progresses to graduation. Many times, though, students are not diagnosed until their 20s or even later. Often, teachers are the first to notice when students have disabilities, but it is likely that students have known all along that they have had difficulty in learning. “While the diagnosis of a learning disability in an adult brings about many changes in his or her life, it is important to keep in mind that such a diagnosis need not keep someone from pursuing higher education” (*Success*, n.d.). Once recognized, a student needs to pursue a course of action that will facilitate remediation. Testing of that adult is the first step, but many students have no idea where to turn. “Currently, nearly one-third of all freshman with disabilities report having learning disabilities” (*Success*, n.d.). This reason is one of many reasons that support the need for a campus psychologist.

The community college is not only responsible for the academic well-being of a student, it is responsible for the emotional well-being as well. Such an approach to caring about the whole individual is often referred to as the holistic approach to educating an individual. Cohen and Brawer (2003) fully support the holistic approach:

The expression “treating the student as a whole” and “assuming responsibility for the full intellectual, social, and personal development of students” are frequently seen in the student personal literature. By definition, these professionals try to maximize student development in psychic, moral, and

physical, as well as intellectual, realms. To student personnel advocates, students are not minds apart from bodies and emotions; they are whole people, and the college should treat them as such. (p. 201)

The emotional stability of student cannot be discounted. Unlike most students at four year colleges, community college students handle more responsibilities such as work and children and often feel more stress. A greater number of community college students are also underprepared for college, so they are trying to remediate their skills while taking classes. In addition, little collegiality occurs due to commuting to campus. Often, students have no one to turn to in handling their problems. In 2005, Noel-Levitz conducted a national research study comparing the receptivity of personal counseling of students at 4-year private institutions, 4-year public institutions, and 2-year public institutions. For each of the survey questions, students at 2-year institutions reported a higher level of need. In the national research study, 100,573 students responded to the questionnaire. The results regarding receptivity to personal counseling are as follows:

All survey items	Students at 4-year private colleges	Students at 4-year public institutions	Students at 2-year institutions	OVERALL national percentages
Receptivity to personal counseling				
I would like to talk with a counselor about my general attitude toward school.	17.1%	17.6%	18.1%	17.5%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some difficulties in my dating or social life.	7.8%	8.4%	9.1%	8.4%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some emotional tensions that are bothering me.	7.9%	8.2%	9.6%	8.4%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some feelings of discouragement or unhappy thoughts that keep bothering me.	7.6%	7.9%	9.4%	8.2%
I would like to talk with a counselor about eliminating an unwanted habit (e.g. involving food, drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol).	7.8%	8.0%	10.1%	8.5%

I would like to talk with a counselor about some family problems.	5.5%	5.5%	6.7%	5.9%
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(Noel –Levitz, 2006, p. 12)

But the need far exceeds personal counseling. Marsh (2004) found that “counseling center directors and chief student affairs officers have documented (or just agree) that the level of serious mental health problems among college students has increased dramatically over the past decade” (cited in Crady, 2005). Today, these problems range from bipolar disorder, depression, self-mutilation, anxiety, and stress. Brikels and Wheeler (2001) found that “mental health is clearly linked to retention and academic performance” (cited in Harper & Peterson, 2005). Community college students, with the added responsibilities of work and family, clearly have more stress and anxiety added to their already burdened lives. Trying to afford school, food, mortgages, and car payments is too overwhelming for many students, especially women who are trying to raise children on their own and go to college. Middle-aged women are the fastest growing segment of community college students (Owen, 2005). “Moreover, adult women would benefit from interventions by college staff and faculty members to help them manage these stresses and to increase their chances for successful completion” (Owen, 2005).

Also, because of today’s political climate, foreign students are also feeling the pressure of integrating themselves into a college classroom:

The post 9-11 era has made it difficult for international students, particularly Middle Eastern students, to navigate the immigration process. Once on campus, they may face discrimination from members of the institutional and local communities. Discrimination in the campus community ultimately impedes

student development and increases the likelihood that these students will eventually decide to leave the institution. (Crady, 2005)

Harper and Peterson (2005) echo these findings when they state that “for some minority, international, first-generation, or immigrant students, college may mean dealing with new forms of discrimination, a lack of role models, family expectations, and challenges in daily living activities.”

A chain-reaction is likely to occur. Students must work to pay for school and also to support themselves and their families. At the same time, they must strive to do well in their classes to make more money to support their living styles. Stress, anxiety, and depression set in when the student succumbs to feeling overwhelmed. The first sacrifice has to be school; hence, student retention rates skyrocket if there are no safeguards in place to help students cope with all they are trying to handle. Harper and Peterson (2005) found that “if current trends continue, many students will enter college with mental health concerns. Early intervention, referral to appropriate sources, and supportive academic advising can be crucial to the success of these students.”

Physical Health Issues

Physical well-being ties in closely with mental well-being. Needing a band aid or a few aspirin is not the only reason for a Wellness Center on campus. Many students are dealing with problems such as drug and alcohol related issues, pregnancy, STDs, obesity, smoking, and HIV/AIDS to name a few. Students need a place on campus to address these problems and find solutions. “Some colleges are taking their fitness centers a step further as increasingly, colleges are spending millions of dollars on lavish recreation

centers that cater not solely to athletes, but to the everyday student and member of the university community” (*Gym Dandy*, 2002).

Typically, a Wellness Center in a Delaware public high school provides a whole range of services, which have been incorporated to meet the needs of students. The wellness centers are operated by a partnership between the Delaware Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services. These wellness centers offer several benefits, which are free to students, faculty, and staff:

- Physical examinations, whether they are routine for sports or pre-employment
- Health screenings, including those for communicable infections.
- Women’s health care
- Treatment for minor illnesses and injuries
- Immunizations
- Nutrition and weight management
- Individual, family, and group counseling
- Crisis intervention and suicide prevention
- Tobacco cessation counseling
- Drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral
- Outreach to at-risk youth
- Health and nutrition education
- Follow-up as requested by your family health care provider
(The Wellness Center, 2006).

By contrast, Delaware Tech’s Wellness Center consists of a small fitness center where faculty and students can work out on machines or lift weights. In essence, “a representative of Cardio-Kinetics will meet with you, assess your fitness goals, and create a fitness routine specifically for you” (*Who Can*, 2006). A health coordinator, who holds occasional workshops, is shared by Wilmington and Stanton campuses. Delaware Tech’s definition of “Wellness Center” differs from the way it is defined by the State of Delaware as meeting the holistic needs of students.

Conclusion

Student retention issues are clearly defined in the literature. Because community colleges are educational institutions, the most important focus must center on the academic success of the students. Student retention experts offer a clear and concise framework for what needs to be accomplished in students' first year of college. A positive, informative orientation is the first step in connecting students with their institutions. This positive experience continues as advisors meet and connect with students and create personal relationships. As the school year commences, students should be paired with mentors with whom they feel comfortable. The mentor then becomes responsible for helping students with academic, social, and emotional hurdles throughout their college years. In most colleges and universities, support services are readily available, but students need to learn how to access these services and use the services to their advantage. Physically disabled and mentally challenged students are protected and offered services through the American with Disabilities Act of 1992. Foreign students can find help through ESL tutoring services, and minority students can become integrated through diversity programs on the campus and within the classroom. Writing Centers are set up not just for students in English classes, but for writing across the curriculum in all classes. Study skills courses should be integrated and paired with content area classes as well. Since psychological counseling is an important part of a student's well-being, services should be available to all students and faculty. Physical well-being, created through the existence of a Wellness Center, is the final piece in providing services to students. The holistic approach – academic, social, psychological

and physical – is the optimum goal in addressing students' needs and ensuring the path to success.

Paper II: Methodology

In order to address student retention, several methodologies were used to measure the needs of pre-tech students. Two surveys were administered to Pre-Tech Writing and Pre-Tech Reading classes. In addition, a third survey on retention was given to all teaching faculty, while a slightly different version was given to counselors. Full-time English faculty of pre tech students participated in a group discussion on the problem of student retention for that particular group of students. Then, 11 full time English faculty participated in a discussion on the ongoing development of the Writing Center. Two pre-tech students who dropped out of Delaware Tech gave their views on student retention in student interviews. Students, faculty, and advisors were included in the methodology to hear from all the “voices” who would be invested in a successful retention program at Delaware Tech. The three groups echoed the same concerns and offered many of the same solutions. Two other community colleges, Salem Community College (New Jersey) and Cecil County Community College (Maryland), were contacted and asked to provide statistics regarding student retention for a basis of comparison. Full-time English faculty were asked to record the number of students in their classes at the beginning and end of each semester since fall 2002. Those numbers are reported with particular note made of pre-tech reading and pre-tech writing student retention percentages. Finally, a noted retention specialist, Dr. Vincent Tinto of Syracuse University, was interviewed by phone.

Pre-Tech Student Retention Questionnaire

In Spring semester 2006, surveys were given to 16 Pre-Tech Writing classes and 14 Pre-Tech Reading classes (see Appendix A). These surveys measured the needs of

9. Your technology 85% or undeclared 15%
10. How would you identify yourself in terms of socio-economic class?
- | | |
|--------------|-----|
| Lower | 16% |
| Middle | 65% |
| Upper Middle | 10% |
11. Are you full-time (12 credits) or part-time? Full = 51% Part-Time = 49%
12. Are you the first in your family to attend college? Yes: 20% No: 80%
13. Is this your first year at Delaware Tech? Yes: 82% No: 18%
14. Please identify yourself:
- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 32% African American | 8% Hispanic | 55% White |
| 1% Asian | 0% Native American | 1% Indian American |
| 1% African | 1% Others | |

Academic Questions

1. Has Delaware Tech provided the support you need to be successful in your classwork?
- | | |
|---------|-------|
| Yes 96% | No 4% |
|---------|-------|
2. Have you ever used the Writing Center?
- | | |
|---------|--------|
| Yes 38% | No 62% |
|---------|--------|
3. Have you used a tutor at Delaware Tech?
- | | |
|--------|--------|
| Yes 9% | No 91% |
|--------|--------|
4. Have you gone to your instructor for help with assignments?
- | | |
|---------|--------|
| Yes 77% | No 23% |
|---------|--------|
5. How many times have you used the library?
- | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 0 = 34% | 1-5 44% | 6-10 9% | 10+ 13% |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|

6. Do you feel that a mentor would be helpful in helping you to achieve your goals at Delaware Tech?

Yes 65% No 18% Maybe 7%

7. Would you volunteer to be paired with a faculty member as a mentor?

Yes 55% No 43%

Social Questions

1. Has Delaware Tech provided the support you need to thrive socially?

Yes 72% No 28%

2. Do you socialize with other students in your classes?

Yes 89% No 11%

3. Do you attend any school activities?

Yes 8% No 92%

4. Do you have knowledge of school activities?

Yes 19% No 70%

5. Do you feel that a student center might encourage friendships among students at Delaware Tech?

Yes 84% No 16%

Financial Questions

1. Has Delaware Tech given you the financial support to afford your education?

Yes 57% No 43%

2. Do you receive financial aid?

Yes 36% No 64%

3. Are you aware of the scholarship opportunities at Delaware Tech?

Yes 35% No 65%

4. How is your education financed?

35%	financial aid	2%	spouse pays tuition
26%	you pay tuition	6%	scholarships
28%	parents pay tuition	6%	other – GI Bill, Vocational Rehab Grants

Psychological Questions

1. In your opinion, would a campus psychologist be helpful to students?

Yes 77% No 23%

2. Do you think you might talk to a campus psychologist if you had a problem?

Yes 55% No 45%

3. What psychological problem do you most often see on campus?

30%	depression	2%	spousal abuse
15%	alcoholism	9%	drug addiction
69%	stress	3%	eating disorder
32%	anxiety		other – anger, loneliness, smoking

Physical Questions

1. Would a Wellness Center be something you would like to see on campus?

Yes 85% No 15%

2. What physical/social issues do you think need to be addressed here at Delaware Tech?

stress/anxiety	ADHD
alcoholism	explain degree requirements
more student interaction	student/teacher communication
health insurance issues	wellness physician
more physical activities	clubs, anime, games, movies
socializing	fitness center
money for school	pregnancy
dance team	self-esteem
activities	poverty
diversity	drugs sold on campus

3. Do you think you would use the Wellness Center?

Yes 63% No 38%

4. Are there any other areas that you can think of that need to be addressed to help Delaware Tech keep its student population?

better parking	open up more clinicals
no trailers	wellness center
sports programs	lower tuition
better weight room	newsletter
smoke free campus	upgrade student activities
golf team	counseling on how to obtain degree
safety in trailer area	affordable summer tuition for
hazardous walkways	children of DTCC students
reducing course loads	better cafeteria food
better advisement	more outdoor seating
quarter system	more recreational activities
better financial aid options	political campaign
friendly faculty	student activity awareness
more computer labs open more often	

Analysis:

The demographics of the pre-tech students at Delaware Tech reflect the current research findings regarding college education. For more than the last two decades, female students have outnumbered male students. In terms of age, two 17 year old students were still attending high school, while the range ended at age 52. The age mean was 19; the mode was 19; and the median was 22. The ratio of men to women at Delaware Tech is almost two thirds female to one third male in the pre-tech courses.

The students who attend Delaware Tech reflect a white majority, and this fact is also consistent with the national research: “Young men from low income families, which are disproportionately black and Hispanic, are the most underrepresented on campus, though, in middle-income families, too, more daughters than sons attend college” (Lewin, 2006, p. 18). Most students, whether male or female, come to the community college

equipped with a high school degree. At Delaware Tech, only 9 percent of the pre-tech students have achieved a GED.

The majority of students are single; only 9.4 percent are married. One fifth of the student population has children, while almost 11 percent support other family members within the household. These added responsibilities make it imperative that students work while attending college. Many students work full-time; almost an equal number of pre-tech students attend Delaware Tech full-time as part-time.

Students were asked to identify themselves in terms of socioeconomic class. The majority of Delaware Tech's students define themselves as middle class. Almost 16 percent identify themselves as lower class, and about 10 percent state that they represent the upper middle class.

Almost the same percentage of students have attended another college before attending Delaware Tech (18 percent) as students who have returned to Delaware Tech after some period of time (16 percent). These returning students are referred to as students who have "stopped out" rather than dropped out. A slightly higher percentage of pre-tech students are the first in their families to attend college (20 percent) .

The population of the community college is diverse in regards to age, background, and ethnicity. Delaware Tech has a majority of Caucasian students (54.7 percent), followed by African Americans (32 percent), and then Hispanics (7.5 percent). The number of African and Indian American students is increasing.

Academic Questions

A majority of students said that Delaware Tech provided the support necessary to be successful in their classwork. Yet, the numbers reflect that students did not avail

themselves of the services offered. Almost 38 percent of the students sought help at the Writing Center, whereas 62 percent had never taken advantage of the help offered. Fewer than 10 percent had ever requested help from a tutor. Three quarters of the students went to their instructors for help with assignments.

Three quarters of the surveyed students had never used library services. This statistic may be somewhat misleading as students are capable of doing research on the internet and may not feel a need to check out books, videos, or other reference materials. Students can access databases without going to the library. Also, English instructors require that sources used for research papers should not be older than five years, unless the books are providing historical context. Many of the books in Delaware Tech's library do not meet that criteria.

Sixty-five percent felt that a mentor would be useful in helping students to achieve their educational goals. Almost 7 percent were undecided; 18 percent did not support the idea. Retention literature strongly supports faculty mentoring; 55 percent of students agree that mentoring would be helpful to them.

Social Questions

The majority of students felt that Delaware Tech provided them with the support to thrive socially. Almost 90 percent socialized with other students in their classes, whether off or on campus. It was not surprising that almost 95 percent did not attend school events due to the very nature of the community college where students commute daily to jobs or to take care of families. Seventy percent of the pre-tech population was unaware of activities on campus – whether they be sports events, guest speakers, or educational programs.

Approximately 85 percent of the student body felt that a student center might encourage friendships among students. Currently, the cafeteria serves as a gathering place for students because Delaware Tech has no other space where they can gather informally. The cafeteria is impersonal – not an appealing place for students to gather. When the new biotech building is planned, a student center should be a consideration of the administration.

Financial Questions

Delaware Tech offers a myriad of options for those who seek an education. Financial aid, scholarships, and grants are available to those eligible – which includes most of the student populations. Almost 60 percent of students say that Delaware Tech has given them the financial support to make their education more affordable. Two-thirds of Delaware Tech’s students take advantage of financial aid. Unfortunately, two thirds of the pre-tech students are unaware of the scholarship opportunities. Annually, Delaware Tech (Stanton/Wilmington) receives a total of \$480,769 from employee giving, the state funded academic scholarship incentive, and special events.

Of the 159 students surveyed, 55 receive financial aid; 41 pay their own tuition bills; 45 students’ parents pay; 3 spouses pay; 9 receive scholarships; and 9 others receive funds through the GI Bill, vocational rehabilitation programs, or grants. Thus, only one-quarter of the students are able to finance their education themselves.

Psychological Questions

Five years ago, a part-time psychologist was employed at Delaware Tech, but his contract was not renewed due to budgetary constraints. When pre-tech students were asked if a campus psychologist was needed, 123 out of 159 (77 percent) responded

affirmatively. Fewer students, 87 of these 159 (55 percent), said that they would be willing to talk to the psychologist if they felt they had a problem.

Many students identified psychological problems they observed among students on campus. The number one problem cited was stress, followed by anxiety and depression. Alcoholism followed fourth; drug addiction, eating disorders, anger, loneliness, and smoking were reported with lower incidences. Thus, stress from schoolwork had a greater impact than many social problems.

Physical Questions

Delaware Tech employed a part-time nurse for the 7,000 students who attended classes at Stanton campus until Fall 2006. In addition, a fitness center is available and free for full time and part-time faculty who pass a physical fitness test. Full-time students must pay \$30 per semester; part-time students must pay \$60 per semester. A health coordinator is also on campus. So, although a myriad of health services does exist, students are not aware of Delaware Tech's Wellness Center. Yet, 135 students out of 159 state that a wellness center would be a welcome addition to the facilities. Students identified a variety of physical/social issues that they deemed relevant: pregnancy, self-esteem, health insurance, diversity, ADHD, are just a few of the issues that students named as needing to be addressed. (See list in survey). One hundred students surveyed said that they would make use of a wellness center if it were available.

The final question on the survey asked if there were any other areas that needed to be addressed that were not mentioned in the questionnaire. Students provided some thought provoking answers:

ACADEMIC	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL	FINANCIAL
Open up more clinics	Upgrade student activities	Better parking	Lower tuition
Newsletter	More outdoor seating	No trailers	Better financial aid options
Reducing course loads	More recreational activities	Wider range of sports	Affordable summer camp tuition for children of DTCC students
Better advisement	Political campaigns on campus	Better weight room	
Quarter system	Student activity awareness	Wellness Center	
Friendly faculty		Smoke free campus	
Counseling on how to obtain a degree		Golf team	
More computer labs open more often		Safety in trailer area	
		Hazardous walkways	
		Better cafeteria food	

Not all suggestions can be addressed, yet many are feasible. Some suggestions require money, which is not always available. Yet, other suggestions require only ingenuity and insight. If student retention is a goal of the college, then faculty and the administration need to be aware of student concerns.

Academic Advising Survey

One of the consistently voiced complaints of pre-tech students is related to academic advising. In Spring semester 2006, Pre-Tech Writing and Pre-Tech Reading classes were surveyed to validate or refute many of the negative claims students were making about the effectiveness of the advisors. (see Appendix B). The Academic Advising Survey was constructed by Noel-Levitz, Inc., an educational retention institution that seeks to improve retention in colleges and universities. As some students are enrolled in both pre-tech reading and writing classes, they were asked to fill out the

survey only once. This population was also surveyed for the Student Retention Questionnaire; the number of students differs due to the absentee rate on the day the survey was given (159 versus 167). Surveys were given out during class; no one refused to take the survey. Of the 167 students, 60 students checked that they had never met with their academic advisor; therefore, they could not attest to the effectiveness of advising. The fact that 35 percent of Pre Tech college students had never seen their advisor was a problem itself. Almost 18 percent of these students were the first in their families to attend college.

Of the remaining 107 students who filled in the survey questions, almost one third were the first in their family to attend college. Fifteen questions were asked, and a rating scale was used to answer the questions based on the student's experience with his/her advisor:

- A = Excellent
- B = Above Average
- C = Average
- D = Below Average
- F = Poor

Analysis:

The results of the survey of first generation pre-tech students are reported separately. Because these families have little or no knowledge of the college experience, one would assume that the advisory component of the college experience would have a greater impact on first generation students. These students may need to depend on their advisors not only for academic information but also for guidance in handling financial aid, scholarship information, and a myriad of other problems. On the whole, students found that advisors were available and approachable, yet, they seemed to view the

advisor/advisee relationship as purely mechanical – one designed only to schedule classes. The numbers reflect a superficial relationship, not one in which advisors are invested in the success of the students.

The analysis of their responses to the questions follows:

1. Over half of the student (19/30) indicated that advisors were approachable and receptive to their needs and concerns.
2. Again, over half the students (18/30) stated that advisors scored an excellent to above average rating on being accessible to students during office hours or by appointment.
3. Fewer than half (14/30) felt that the advisor was someone with whom they could talk freely. This percentage may be a reflection of being intimidated by authority figures; this would be one area of concern.
4. Half the students felt that the advisors cared about and took interest in them as individuals.
5. Half the students noted that the advisors helped them to understand and be informed about academic requirements.
6. A little over half the students (18/30) gave advisors high marks in their knowledge of academic courses, programs, and procedures, while 8 of those students marked D or F in this area.
7. Over half of the students (17/30) felt advisors provided accurate appropriate information about their areas of interest and major.
8. Half of the students (16/30) rated advisors highly in referring them to the appropriate person, office or resources.

9. Fewer than half (14/30) stated that the advisor facilitates the student's understanding of the student's abilities, interests, and potential, while 7 students marked D or F in this area.
10. In general, students (13/30) gave low marks to advisors in reference to encouraging their growth as a student and an individual. Eight students graded advisors with Ds or Fs.
11. Students (13/30) did not feel that advisors discussed their academic goals and progress toward these goals.
12. Advisors received low marks when rated on discussing long term career goals. Only 10 of 30 stated they felt that advisors were excellent or above average in this area. Seven students graded advisors with Ds or Fs.
13. Over half the students (18/30) felt that advisors respected their rights to make decisions.
14. Half of the students saw advisement as a cooperative effort.
15. Half of the students felt that the advisor had a positive, constructive attitude toward working with them.

The above percentages were based on "excellent" and "above average" marks; a "C" grade is average or mediocre. The grades of D or F were noted when seven or more students marked this as an area of deficiency. In general, students gave the advisors low marks in terms of helping them to succeed in college. The results reveal that students find advisors to be competent in knowing the college curriculum and scheduling them into classes. Students felt that the personal piece of advisement was missing. Students did not feel as though the advisors were invested in them as individuals trying to meet

their educational goals.

Analysis of Non-First Generation Students:

The non-first generation students numbered 76. Their responses and needs differed from first generation college students. The scale for rating remained the same.

1. Almost two thirds of the students (49/76) felt that advisors were approachable and receptive to their needs and concerns.
2. Forty-one students found advisors to be accessible, while 35 gave advisors an average or below average grade.
3. The grade of C was given by 26/76 students who felt that their advisor was someone with whom they could talk freely. This number contrasts with the 20 and 22 students who rated this area excellent and above average, respectively.
4. Again, the highest number of students (27/76) marked that advisors were average in the concern and interest shown to students as individuals.
5. Most student (46/76) felt that their advisors helped them be informed about academic requirements.
6. Most students (54/76) felt that their advisors were knowledgeable about academic courses, programs and procedures.
7. Most students (51/76) felt that advisors provided accurate appropriate information regarding their majors and interests.
8. Half the students stated that advisors did an excellent or above average job at referring them to the appropriate person, office, or resources, whereas half said advisors were mediocre at best.

9. The numbers decline when students were asked about advisors facilitating self understanding of abilities, interests, and growth. Seven students rated advisors in the D and F areas.
10. More students (47/76) felt advisors encouraged their growth and development than did not.
11. In discussing academic goals and progress toward these goals, 11 students ranked advisors at the D and F levels; 19 rated them with a C; only 37 rated them above average or excellent.
12. Advisors' ratings were low in regard to discussing long range goals. Only 46/76 rated advisors excellent or above average; 39/76 rated advisors average or below. This question had the highest number of D's and F's at (13).
13. Most students 50/76 felt advisors respected their rights to make their own decisions.
14. Forty eight students rated excellent or above average regarding advising as a cooperative effort.
15. Most students (49/76) felt advisors had a positive, constructive attitude when working with them as advisees.

Both first generation students and non-first generation students gave negative responses for three specific questions: 9, 11, and 12. Question 9 asked whether the advisor facilitates self-understanding of abilities, interests, and potential. Question 10 rated whether the advisor encourages the student's growth and development as a individual. Question 12 asked students to rate the advisor's interest in discussing long

range goals. The responses fell below the 50 percentage mark, and all 3 questions scored 7 or more D and F grades. These negative results support the idea that students do not feel that the advisors care about them beyond their Delaware Tech experience. In future student retention studies, it would be interesting to note the students who consistently registered negative answers to questions. These students are the alienated students who could be addressed through early intervention.

Also, these surveys and interviews were given at the end of the semester. In future studies, surveys could be given at the beginning and end of the semester to determine whether student responses differ during different times. Administering the surveys early would help to identify the groups of students at risk for dropping out or stopping out. As is usually the case, this data could be looked at through several different lenses. The research needs to be cognizant of other assumptions and conclusions that can be reached.

Faculty Student Retention Survey

In April 2006, 100 full-time faculty members were asked to respond to a survey on student retention; 69 faculty members returned the survey (see Appendix C). The survey was made up of eight questions which required faculty members to check one answer or a multitude of choices. Question 9 asked for any additional comments. Faculty members, however, wrote in answers to many of the questions.

Analysis:

The faculty has strong opinions about student retention, and they were not reluctant about adding their comments in the margins. Of the 69 respondents, 60 felt that student retention was a problem. Faculty reported that approximately 25 percent of

students dropped out or stopped out each semester; the number of pre tech drop outs/stop outs is actually higher.

Family problems were cited as the most common reason for students to leave Delaware Tech followed by the unpreparedness of students and their work related problems. Other related reasons listed by faculty reflect a sense of frustration by the instructors regarding students' commitment to their education.

The factors that influenced students to stay in school ranged from on site daycare to a psychologist on campus to tutoring, in that order. Faculty also felt that mentoring by faculty and better advisement were strong components in student retention.

As most of the full-time faculty have worked at Delaware Tech for at least ten years, they have well formed ideas about student retention from their years of experience. Many faculty offer good, workable suggestions that the administration may want to consider in future planning: a reading specialist, an eight week study week, a more integrated study skills program, and the idea of a weekend college. All of these suggestions seem viable, especially if Delaware Tech continues to remain competitive in the education market. As the older college student population grows steadily, Delaware Tech competes with Wilmington College, Strayer University, Wesley College, Salem Community College, and Cecil Community College.

In further exploring the factors affecting student retention, the next survey question asked what one factor would have the greatest influence on student retention. Again, faculty supported the idea that students should have better study skills; in fact, some asked that a mandatory study skills program be implemented for all students. Mentoring was the second most mentioned factor followed by more available financial

aid and better advisement of students. Health care was mentioned as a major factor, but Delaware Tech cannot control state and federal programs related to health care.

Most of the faculty respondents (47/69) stated that they would be willing to mentor students. Many stated that they felt that mentoring was already an informal aspect of their jobs whether or not they were assigned as advisors. In many ways, the extended responsibility of any teacher is to be a good listener and offer help and guidance in many areas other than subject matter.

An overwhelming number of faculty (55/69) stated that student retention should be addressed by all involved in the students' education. The counselors, faculty, and administration should all play major roles in looking at this problem and finding solutions. The student retention committee should formulate a plan to increase retention. Then, the student retention committee should convey the views of counselors, faculty and administration in finding solutions.

The final question asked whether healthcare plays a major role in students' dropping out. This question was answered in two ways. Many respondents felt that students signed up as full-time to stay on their parents' healthcare policies. Other respondents felt that students had to work full-time jobs to qualify for healthcare benefits. Either way, the question of healthcare has a definite impact on student retention.

Many faculty took advantage of the additional comments section to express their views. Again, the themes of underpreparedness and the need for study skills were voiced by many. Some solutions such as improving the process of registration are prudent and practical. Other such solutions involved the cafeteria and services to students who attended evening sessions. Many faculty seemed hopeful that these problems could be

resolved and that by working together, Delaware Tech could better address students' needs.

Counselor Student Retention Survey

In April 2006, counselors were asked to fill in the same student retention surveys that were given to full time faculty (see Attachment D) Of the 7 surveys distributed, 6 were returned.

Analysis:

The lack of participation by counselors hindered development of a true analysis of student retention from the counselors' point of view. Yet, once again, the same deficiencies mentioned by faculty were also identified by those counselors who responded. The lack of study skills was again a theme as was the emphasis on more financial aid through counseling and scholarship information. Counselors validated that students need to feel connected to their institutions whether through participating in activities, mentoring, or providing for other student needs. Students need to feel that Delaware Tech exists and revolves around them – that faculty and the administration value them as students and individuals and strive to meet their individual needs.

Full-Time English Instructors of Pre-Tech Students Interview

Instructors were first asked about the characteristics that defined pre-tech students (see Appendix E). They replied with the following answers: underprepared, first generation, need to work, overwhelmed with other life responsibilities – definitely needy students.

Part of their underpreparedness involves the fact that they are not readers; thus their comprehension, vocabulary, and awareness of syntax and sentence structure is

lacking. When asked to read out loud, many refuse or stumble over word pronunciation. Because reading and writing are skills that are intertwined, instructors were asked the reading level of most of their students. Eric said that it was definitely below 12th grade level, while Carol said their reading levels were probably middle school level. The CPT score does not correlate the sentence skills or vocabulary section to a reading level.

Eric gives the Gates McGinitie to his pre-tech classes and stated that most students scored in the tenth grade range. He makes taking the test an option for students wishing to take Critical Reading and Thinking (RDG 120), which is the next level course in the English course sequence. Eric reported that “only a handful” decided to take the test because most students are aware of their lack of basic reading and writing skills. Due to the low level of reading ability, employing a reading specialist was suggested, and all thought that would be beneficial.

Instructors were then asked what one solution could be offered to increase student retention. Many felt that better advisement was needed. Mary felt that better advisement was needed. Carol felt that we should increase all support services to the pre-tech population. Kristin said that one-on-one individual attention through a mentoring program would be helpful. Eric stated that better preparation for students would be effective. He had been teaching a liaison program between Mt. Pleasant and Delaware Tech, and he was surprised at how underprepared students were for the classes at Delaware Tech. He said that “their high school efforts really fell far short of his expectations”.

Instructors then turned their attention to study skills as that seemed a likely segue from the underpreparedness of students. The common theme that runs through what all

faculty and pre-tech English faculty, in particular, are saying is that students are lacking study skills. This lack of how to study and organize hinders their success in all subject areas. Faculty support the idea that the course Mastering College Life should be made mandatory for all first year students. This foundation, then, would help students to understand how to succeed in their coursework. Study skills are taught in the Critical Reading and Thinking course, but that course is taken after the basic and pre-tech level courses.

Regarding advisement, all instructors felt that counselors and faculty should work together through a coordinated effort. Counselors should be available to closely monitor a student's progress or failure. Grouping of like students would help instructors to address certain classes with similar problems or disabilities. With more refined tests and measures, students could also be grouped according to reading levels and ability.

In addition, other support services, such as a psychologist on campus, were strongly urged. Carol felt that there "was a big need to be met" due to the stress levels of students. Kay Keenan, one of the chairs of the Student Retention Committee said that one of the needs that came out of the retention survey of department chairs stressed the presence of a psychologist on campus.

Physical support services, such as a daycare and wellness center were suggested to improve the students quality of life at Delaware Tech. One instructor stated that many times students cannot attend because "children are sick or the person who takes care of them is sick." Others felt that the availability of health-related information and care would through a wellness center would be helpful in helping students to address their

social and emotional needs. The consensus formed by pre-tech faculty was that students, particularly pre-tech students, need more support to be successful.

Full-Time English Faculty/Writing Center Interview

The Writing Center provides major support to student providing help in writing essays, research papers, proposals, and writing across the curriculum. In addition, help is available for tutoring in grammar, editing, revising, and researching. Eight computers are available for student use. The Writing Center is staffed full-time throughout the day, and is open during limited hours on evenings and weekends. In addition, some English faculty schedule a few part-time hours there as part of their teaching load. In the past year, the English department has made a concerted effort to make the Writing Center a viable component of the college and of student retention. In the 2005-2006 school year, the students who were helped almost doubled from the previous school year.

In May 2006, the English department faculty met to discuss ways to increase use of the Writing Center and to discuss writing center related issues. The relevant part of the discussion follows:

Carol: As you know, we have a new coordinator and a new tech person in the Writing Center. This semester we increased attendance in the writing center substantially. One month, in particular, we had 477 contacts with students in the writing center. That brought problems with it, as you might expect. So, anyway, I know that faculty has had some concerns, and I wanted to get, in writing today, a list of some of the things we should address – some of the problems you had – some of the good things you wanted to comment on . . . things you think need to be changed.

Jill: Could I ask, How did you increase your numbers?

Carol: From our advertising. We put information on the electronic signage. We put posters around the school. We sent flyers to all the adjuncts and all the faculty. We visited, particularly, adjunct classrooms and made presentations about the writing center, what its functions were and so on. That was the primary way that we increased attendance in the writing center.

Jill: Okay, thanks.

Jerry: Are you keeping track of who's actually being coached?

Carol: Yes, we weren't in the beginning, but now we've started marking the sign in sheet with an X, so we'll be able to differ from who is coming to do word processing and who is coming to be tutored. That will be something new for the fall, and I would like to signify who is ESL out of that population. One thing that Bill found is that he is getting a lot of people needing ESL help, and we don't really have the expertise to handle that.

Jill: Does Elrod?

Carol: A little, but whether or not they'd give him release time, I don't know.

Kristin: I find that to be a big frustration with ESL students because I know how it should be written, but I don't know how to explain how it should be written. I wish I had that - occasionally. I give them El's name, but I feel that's unfair to him.

Jerry: The issue is that Stanton needs an ESL department.

Ray: Yes.

The discussion continued, but the information was not relevant to student retention.

Analysis:

Full-time English faculty has worked hard this year to make the Writing Center an inviting place on campus where students feel comfortable coming for help. Instructors have had their classes visit the center, and Writing Center personnel has gone into classes to introduce themselves and to give information about the help students can receive.

The numbers have increased; more students are receiving help. Yet, as one can see from the discussion, the number of ESL students is growing, and no one at Stanton Campus is trained to deal with the ESL population. So, there is a disconnect in how to teach writing skills as the syntax of different language creates problems for writers. Most times, ESL students cannot hear the differences in the language, much less write it correctly. As of August 2006, 8 hours of ESL tutoring is being offered each week. If we are admitting more foreign students, we have to address their needs as well.

Pre-Tech Student Interviews: One drop out/one stop out

Two students who were in my pre tech writing class agreed to do interviews after they stopped attending (see Appendix F). Ashley dropped out after several absences from class. Greg, who was taking my class for the second time, dropped out with only a few classes remaining. He returned in summer session to take pre tech writing for a third time. Both students had learning disabilities, but only Greg had self identified to the disabilities counselor, Rodney Reeves.

Student Interview: Ashley

Ashley started Delaware Tech three weeks into the semester. Her financial aid had not been set up correctly through the Department of Labor, so she failed to attend

classes. Ashley was labeled as a special education student in high school, so she qualified for a tuition free program set up by the state. Originally, she self-identified as a special ed. student when she first started a year ago before dropping out due to missed classes. When she returned, she failed to self-identify again, which would have enabled her to receive special services. She did notify instructors that “she’d been in a fight, and was in the hospital,” but by that time, she was already weeks behind. Then, she was admitted to The Rockford Center, and she did not call any of her instructors as she “just wasn’t thinking straight.” Ashley wanted to prove to everybody that I can do it on my own.”

At this point, Ashley motioned that she was wanted to talk to me, but unrecorded. She had been in the Rockford Center for a suicide attempt, and things were still not good at home. If Ashley had talked to a psychologist at Del Tech, or even to a counselor, she might have been made to see that Delaware Tech was not the right place for her. She did not have the academic skills to achieve beyond the pre-tech level. She just kept signing up for classes and then failing those classes for a myriad of reasons. She was emotionally fragile and could not possibly have handled the stress of attending school. Delaware Tech has an open door admission policy, but that does not mean that everyone can attain a college degree.

Student Interview: Greg

Greg, another pre-tech student, dropped out of pre-tech writing even though he was passing. “He had – for medical reasons – to go to the hospital.” When asked if he would have gone to talk to a psychologist on campus or gone to a Campus Wellness Center if either were available. “Actually, someone from my high school told me there

was a wellness center or sports center here. That's why I came here, but then I heard we didn't have one."

Greg needed extra help for a learning disability, which he attained through Rodney Reeves. Greg had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and had set up tutoring through a friend. He stated, that he tried to obtain a tutor through Delaware Tech, "but they didn't have anything for writing – no volunteers." He Sporadically visited The Writing Center. Asked if he would ask for a tutor when he returned to pre-tech writing, he replied, "Yes, I actually plan to schedule when I can go to The Writing Center or my off campus tutor or if they have on available here."

Greg could have benefited from an on campus tutor. He was lacking in organizational skills, and he asked for clarification of assignments two and three times during class. Assignments are always spoken, then written on the board, and given again in Blackboard in an attempt to accommodate all learning styles. He was often confused, and he never handed in class work during class time. He also redid his work at home – probably with the help of his tutor. A mentor could have given him further encouragement. Yet, it will be interesting to see if he can handle regular college level coursework.

Student Retention: Cecil Community College and Salem Community College

For a basis of comparison, two colleges, Cecil Community College (Maryland) and Salem Community College (New Jersey) were contacted regarding student retention. These two community colleges were chosen because of their proximity to Delaware Tech. Like Delaware Tech, Cecil Community College is "centrally located with 50 miles of both Baltimore and Philadelphia" (Marquette, 2002). Cecil Community College has a

smaller student body of 1,916 students (*Cecil Factbook*, n.d.) as compared to Delaware Tech students, with a student population of over 7,000 (Stanton Campus). These two colleges were contacted to create benchmarks against which Delaware Tech could measure its success. The retention data from both, however, was illusive and therefore could not be seriously considered.

Cecil Community College is of particular importance because many of Delaware Tech's students become frustrated with the long wait to place into nursing clinicals, so they transfer to Cecil Community College in order to finish their degree. This fact is supported by the Cecil Factbook website which charts the ten year increase in the area of health services. The trend toward increasing numbers in students who continue in their coursework has increased by in the ten year span from 1996-2005 (*Cecil Factbook*, n.d.). According to the Retention Director at Cecil Community College, Tomeka Swan, Cecil Community College has made a concerted effort to address retention:

At Cecil Community College, educators have put an emphasis on retention efforts. Through an online academic monitoring system, explains Swan, faculty members can track student attendance and performance. Retention letters, which detail campus options for academic improvement, and support workshops are offered to students who are performing below par.

“We want to make sure all of our students are on target.” says Swan.

(*Cecil Factbook*, 2006).

Tomeka Swan was contacted and asked to answer five questions regarding student retention (personal communication, August 16, 2006):

1. Is student retention a problem at Cecil Community College?

Swan: No, not really. We work hard on student retention. At the beginning of the semester, we offer a Welcome Back Program during the first week back. We try to ensure student success by making them aware of the support services offer. We have an online academic monitoring system where teachers can go in and check on the names of students who need help. These students then get a letter. The advisors reach out to do whatever they can. There's always room for improvement, but we do pretty well.

2. What percentage of students drop out of classes each semester?

Swan: I really don't know. I don't have those numbers (Both colleges seemed reluctant to give out that information).

3. Are faculty involved in addressing student retention?

Swan: Yes, definitely.

4. Is this an ongoing process? How long has Cecil Community College been addressing this problem?

Swan: Well, I've been here for over ten years. I'm head of the Retention Committee, and we've been doing it for as long as I've been here.

5. Have your efforts been successful?

Swan: Yes. We have been retaining our students. We have a retention committee, and we come up with new initiatives all the time. For instance, this year, we came up with the final exam stress buster. We put together a tool kit which offers strategies and gives students the tools to take tests.

Salem Community College, a small public institution is located just over the Delaware Memorial Bridge in Carney’s Point, New Jersey. The enrollment, according to a 2004 study, was 1,150 students (*Salem*, 2006). Recent academic developments at the college have put it in competition for students, particularly nursing students: “Salem Community College graduates may now transfer credit into a number of Wilmington College bachelor’s degree programs including nursing, elementary education, and sports management thanks to a dual admission agreement the colleges signed on May 24, 2006” (*SCC News*, 2006).

The frustration of nursing students who have to wait several semesters to get into clinicals, may make Salem Community College a viable alternative. The Coordinator of Research and Planning, John Pigeon, was contacted and asked the same questions that were given to the Cecil Community College Retention Director, but Mr. Pigeon stated that he was unable to participate in an interview.

English Department Retention Statistics

All full-time English instructors were asked to give student retention numbers at the beginning and each semester since Fall 2002 (see Appendix H). Drop out percentages were calculated for all English classes that handed in the survey. The drop-out percents follow:

<u>Fall 2002</u>	August-December – all classes	28%
	Pre-Tech Reading	17%
	17% Pre-Tech Writing	28.3%
<u>Spring 2003</u>	Unavailable	
<u>Fall 2003</u>	August-December – all classes	25%

	Pre-Tech Reading	14%
	Pre-Tech Writing	13%
<u>Spring 2004</u>	January to May – all classes	27%
	Pre-Tech Reading	16%
	Pre-Tech Writing	23%
<u>Fall 2004</u>	August to December – all classes	19%
	Pre-Tech Reading	17%
	Pre-Tech Writing	16%
<u>Spring 2005</u>	January – May – all classes	26.1%
	Pre-Tech Reading	21%
	Pre-Tech Writing	24%
<u>Fall 2005</u>	September-December - all classes	21%
	Pre-Tech Reading	unavailable
	Pre-Tech Writing	15%
<u>Spring 2006</u>	January – May - all classes	29%
	Pre-Tech Reading	28%
	Pre-Tech Writing	28%

Analysis:

Statistics for student retention were recorded from Fall 2002 until Spring 2006. During that time span, the average drop-out rate in all English classes [not all reported] was 25 percent. In the pre-tech classes, 18.8 percent dropped out of Pre-Tech Reading, whereas 21 percent dropped out of Pre-Tech Writing. In all Spring semesters, the drop-out rate was higher for all classes and higher for all pre-tech classes.

Interview with Dr. Vincent Tinto

Vincent Tinto, Ph.D., at Syracuse University, has written several books and papers on the subject of retention. Dr. Tinto, a pioneer in the field of student retention, has written one of the most definitive books on the subject: *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. Dr. Tinto has long promoted the idea of students as communities of learners. Tinto advocates that learning communities should initially be set up by counselors and faculty and should target freshmen students in particular. Tinto feels that learning communities are a major step in student bonding and institutional alliance, which then leads to retention and, ultimately, financial gain for the institution.

The interview questions and answers follow:

1. You suggest that improving study skills for at-risk students could be achieved through “integrated academic assistance.” How effective do you think faculty are at teaching study skills?

Tinto: “For academic assistance to be helpful, it’s important that that assistance is connected to the other courses. We have been looking at learning communities, and they are effective when those connections are made. The same can be true with supplemental instruction. The point is, academic assistance tends to be more effective in helping students when that assistance is tied directly to the classes and the learning tasks they encounter in class. By the way, let me observe, faculty, therefore, are very important because faculty work across these classes and cause them [students] to better use the skills they learn in one course to [transfer to] what they learn in another course.”

2. Through my surveys of faculty and students, the need for a psychologist seems crucial, yet the administration does not seem to support the idea. Do you have any thoughts or comments?

Tinto: “No, I do not. I don’t know your institution, and I don’t know what its issues are.”

3. Do you feel that it is valid to try to group students into classes according to their scores on the placement test?

Tinto: “Well, it all depends on how accurate the placement tests are. Assuming those tests are accurate, which means they actually distinguish, in detail, the differences in learning skills of different-students, then that’s a question . . . then one could argue that it’s easier to teach classes in which skills are not so wide from the highest to lowest. That’s specific to running a classroom well – whether it’s lecturing or it’s group work, having a very large variance in learning skills makes it challenging. But, it doesn’t mean that everyone has to be the same in the class.”

4. How important are the physical surroundings? We have no student center, for example. Do you feel that having a student center is important for students to gather to feel connected to one another?

Tinto: “Well, you’ve said several things: that students need a place to gather in order to feel connected to one another and that doesn’t necessarily follow students who gather and not feel connected. They can gather and not necessarily feel connected. You’re making two assumptions. Look, there are many ways students can become involved. Some involve classroom pedagogies like quality teaching and learning communities, and some may involve social activities that may occur

in a student union. There are many ways of building engagement, and a student union is not the only one. So, if you're asking me to say should an institution build a student union, my answer is the institution should find ways to engage students with each other in learning. If it involves a student union, fine. If it involves classroom pedagogy, fine. You're trying to get me to commit to a question about your campus, and that's unfair. I have no way of judging the answer to a question that affects your specific campus."

5. If you had one piece of advice to give to community colleges to try and increase student retention, what would that be?

Tinto: "There's no such thing as one thing. Look, student retention, whatever that retention word means, involves a range of activities. If you have to focus your allocated resources to one time period, it's best to focus on the beginning when the student enters that institution - and specifically in the key gateway courses, the foundational courses, in which they have to acquire skills. And, without acquiring those skills, they will not be effective. So, I can tell you the time and place where you locate these resources. It doesn't mean that you don't put resources elsewhere. But then the question is, if you locate your resources into the first year courses, in those gateway courses, what is the one thing you must do? You must bring together, align your actions, so students can be successful in those classes. Doing that takes several things, but that's the one thing that you must seek - getting students to be successful in those gateway classes in that first semester or quarter or year (personal communication, September 5, 2006).

Note: Dr. Tinto expressed that he did not know of or about my institution, and he did not want any of his comments used in any policy dispute or taken out of context. I assured him that his comments would be used only for the purpose of my dissertation and that he would not be compromised in any way.

Paper III: Recommendations

Student retention is a universal problem faced by colleges and universities across America. The purpose of this dissertation was to look at student retention at the community college in general, then at Delaware Technical and Community College in particular. Four areas of needs were explored: academic, psychological, social, and physical. The intent was to hear the students' voices and formulate a plan to answer their needs. To that end, surveys and interviews were conducted with faculty, students, and advisors.

We know that the first year of the college experience is the most important as statistics prove that the first year determines student persistence. Academic institutions, then, must focus most of their student retention strategies on entering freshmen. First, a comprehensive strategic student retention plan needs to be devised. In Fall 2005, the Retention Task Force was formed by the Dean of Instruction to address the Middle States evaluation team's recommendation to develop a formal retention strategy. The task force completed its study and issued its report in Spring 2006. If Delaware Tech wants to implement and commit faculty to a student retention plan in all technology areas, the recommendations need to be reported to instructional faculty and staff.

In the area of academia, the student must be valued and made to feel a part of the college even before the school year begins. Orientation plays an important role in how students perceive their institution. Because Delaware Tech appeals to working men and women, it is imperative that orientation be held several times throughout the week. Students who have already matriculated at Delaware Tech should be recruited to be a part of the process in answering questions and guiding prospective students. This connection

is a valuable part of aligning students with their institutions. Childcare could be offered while students meet with advisors, take a physical tour of the school, visit the Writing Center and library, and discuss financial aid with a staff member.

Through surveys, students reported that they felt that their relationships with advisors were only perfunctory. To improve the relationship and the effectiveness of advising, advisors should set up meetings with prospective students to help plan schedules, listen to their concerns, and find answers to their questions. The advisor/advisee relationship should continue through college email or direct personal contact. Advisors should try to connect with students on a continual basis. Advisors might try to spend one of their workdays located in a technology area so that students identify a certain counselor with a certain area of technology.

One of the major concerns of faculty is that students are underprepared for college classes. This theme persisted through faculty and advisor interviews and surveys. Faculty felt that a study skills program for all pre-tech students should be mandatory if student persistence was determined to be a goal of the college. Currently, a one credit college life course is optional for students. The faculty in all technologies could work together in determining exactly what skills students need, from test-taking to determining the main idea. An across-the-curriculum approach should be taken with students so that they see the importance of applying study skills in all content areas. The course could be taught by instructors in any of the technologies, not just English faculty. This suggestion could be accomplished practically, yet it would have the greatest impact on the persistence of the first year developmental population. Also, advisors should develop a campus-wide early detection system for students who are having academic difficulties.

Other academic support systems are just as important. Surveys indicated that two-thirds of the pre-tech population had never been to the Writing Center for help, yet 45 percent of developmental students have a GPA of 2.00 or below. In the past two semesters, the Writing Center has increased its visibility through advertising and the increased awareness created through English faculty. Yet, students need to realize that writing across the curriculum is just as important as writing in an English class; the two are not separate entities. Collegewide, faculty need to be made aware of the writing standards and research paper format expected at Delaware Tech. This fall, The Writing Center has employed two part-time ESL tutors, a support service that was badly needed. In addition, an educational diagnostician should be employed to help address the disabilities of the developmental population. If a college's mission is to be "open door," then the colleges should accommodate those with learning deficiencies and handicaps.

Another innovative program that could be piloted is a faculty mentoring program. Many instructors expressed that mentoring was already an informal part of their jobs just by the nature of teaching in a community college. Yet, this idea could be taken a step further. Faculty members could volunteer to be student mentors and could choose students from their classes who need extra help and guidance. Records would be kept of numbers of contacts, services provided, and an informal journal recording progress. A statistical analysis of student retention could be on-going to determine the effectiveness of a mentoring program. In the pre-tech student survey, 104 students reported they would favor faculty mentoring; 11 students said they might be willing to give mentoring a try; 29 were unwilling. If the pilot program was successful, other students would feel encouraged to be paired with a faculty member. Statistics prove that students tend to stay

at institutions with which they feel aligned. Faculty interest and community is one of the most positive ways to ensure student retention.

Besides academic support, students often have financial concerns that preclude them from staying in school. Delaware Tech has a scholarship initiative that allows students to apply for scholarships based on their grade point average. Annually, Delaware Tech receives scholarship money through state initiatives (SEED program), corporate donations, and employee giving. Yet, the number of students applying for scholarships is not commensurate with the number of students who would qualify: According to the survey, almost two-third of pre-tech students were unaware of scholarships at Delaware Tech. This year, over 400 incoming freshmen have received SEED scholarships from the State of Delaware. The SEED money pays for basic courses, which financial aid does not; therefore, many incoming freshmen apply for this scholarship, but their academic skills may be very low. Delaware Tech, through its scholarship committee, needs to do a better job advertising scholarships opportunities so that more students apply for them.

To create social bonds, Delaware Tech needs to provide a comfortable space for students to congregate. Of the 159 pre-tech students surveyed, 134 responded that Delaware Tech needed a student center. Currently, students gather in the cafeteria and hallway areas to study together and socialize. Students need a place where they can find class information, build friendships, acquire knowledge regarding campus activities due to work and childcare schedules. The community college population is transient; a student center may provide a reason to spend more time on campus. A student center would offer students a safe, comfortable place away from the classroom to connect with

other students and share concerns and problems and to create stronger bonds. Delaware Tech needs to provide a student center when the new biotech building is built in 2007.

The complex lives of students cause many other problems with which they have difficulty coping. The combination of work, school, and family life is often too much for individuals to handle. In student surveys, the top three problems cited in student surveys were stress, depression, and anxiety. Both faculty and student surveys indicated a strong need for a psychologist on campus. Student retention literature reveals that many community colleges employ a psychologist full-time. One of the recommendations of the Collegewide Retention Task Force was “hiring an educational psychologist to help identify learning disabilities and work with instructors to develop and incorporate learning strategies.” In addition, they suggested “offering counseling services to serve students struggling with mental health issues.” Many in the developmental population struggle with the demands placed on them. Remediating deficient basic skills, learning time management, coping with learning disabilities – all require skills that many community college students are lacking. A psychologist could help those who need educational testing and counsel those who need help in dealing with social issues. The cost to the college would be minimal in relation to those students who would drop out because of emotional or educational problems. If the administration feels that the cost is too much to incur, then a part-time psychologist could be employed.

Social issues could also be addressed at a wellness center located on campus. In the student survey, 135 students out of 159 saw the need for a health-related center on campus. The State of Delaware supports and funds wellness centers in public schools; Delaware Tech may qualify for such funding. Delaware Tech’s wellness center is

defined as a fitness center with exercise machines and weights. But students at Delaware Tech need a more comprehensive center to deal with social problems and illness: teen pregnancy, AIDS, cancer prevention, and nutrition, among many others. Students said they would use such a service, if available. The State may absorb the cost of providing a wellness center to the college. Wellness Centers are a part of the public school education. As a public, state-funded institution, Delaware Tech may qualify for such services.

Due to the emotional, mental, or physical disabilities, not all students are able to obtain a degree at Delaware Tech. For those students, diploma and certificate programs are offered to prepare students for employment. Several programs are offered in accordance with students' needs; the goal is to give the student "marketable skills" so that they can compete in the workforce. It is the job of advisors to steer students toward the goal that is commensurate with their abilities.

The voices of students, faculty, and advisors have been heard and recorded in this Executive Position Paper. Several themes regarding students' needs have emerged. In the area of academia, faculty, students and advisors all feel that students are underprepared for college. A mandatory study skills course would help to remedy that problem. In addition, better advisement must be implemented and practiced. In the social realm, students need a place to gather in order to align themselves with other students and their institution. In the psychological area, a psychologist must be hired to administer educational testing and offer counseling. A wellness center would complete the holistic approach to meeting students' needs. Delaware Tech has the capacity to be so much better than it is presently. The key to student retention is a coordinated,

cohesive effort by administration, faculty, staff, and students. A student retention plan requires diligence and effort – but most of all, leadership.

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Press.

Appendix A

Personal Information – Circle or fill in answers

1. age: _____
2. male _____ female _____
3. Children? Yes _____ No _____ How many? _____
4. Do you financially support other family members in your household besides your children? Yes _____ No _____
5. single _____ married _____ divorced _____ widowed _____
6. education: high school degree _____
GED _____
2 year degree achieved _____
4 year degree achieved _____
7. Have you ever attended another college? Yes _____ No _____
8. Are you a returning student? (In other words, have you previously attended DTCC and dropped out?) Yes _____ No _____
9. Your technology _____ or undeclared _____
10. How would you identify yourself in terms of socio-economic class?
Lower _____
Middle _____
Upper Middle _____
11. Are you full-time (12 credits) or part time? _____
12. Are you the first in your family to attend college? Yes _____ No _____
13. Is this your first year at Delaware Tech? Yes _____ No _____
14. Please identify yourself:
_____ African American _____ Hispanic _____ White
_____ Asian _____ Native American

Academic Questions

1. Has Delaware Tech provided the support you need to be successful in your classwork?
Yes _____ No _____
2. Have you ever used the Writing Center?
Yes _____ No _____

3. Have you used a tutor at Delaware Tech?
Yes _____ No _____
4. Have you gone to your instructor for help with assignments?
Yes _____ No _____
5. How many times have you used the library?
0 _____ 1-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 10+ _____
6. Do you feel that a mentor would be helpful in helping you to achieve your goals at Delaware Tech?
7. Would you volunteer to be paired with a faculty member as a mentor?
Yes _____ No _____

Social Questions

1. Has Delaware Tech provided the support you need to thrive socially?
Yes _____ No _____
2. Do you socialize with other students in your classes?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Do you attend any school activities?
Yes _____ No _____
4. Do you have knowledge of school activities?
Yes _____ No _____
5. Do you feel that a student center might encourage friendships among students at Delaware Tech?
Yes _____ No _____

Financial Questions

1. Has Delaware Tech give you the financial support to afford your education?
Yes _____ No _____
2. Do you receive financial aid?
Yes _____ No _____
3. Are you aware of the scholarship opportunities at Delaware Tech?
Yes _____ No _____

4. How is your education financed?
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> financial aid | <input type="checkbox"/> spouse pay tuition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> you pay tuition | <input type="checkbox"/> scholarships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> parents pay tuition | <input type="checkbox"/> other |

Psychological Questions

1. In your opinion, would a campus psychologist be helpful to students?
 Yes No
2. Do you think you might talk to a campus psychologist if you had a problem?
 Yes No
3. What psychological problem do you most often see on campus?
- | | |
|------------|-----------------|
| Depression | Spousal Abuse |
| Alcoholism | Drug Addiction |
| Stress | Eating Disorder |
| Anxiety | Other _____ |

Physical Questions

1. Would a Wellness Center be something you would like to see on campus?
 Yes No
2. What physical/social issues do you think need to be addressed here at Delaware Tech?
3. Do you think you would use the Wellness Center?
 Yes No

Are there any other areas that you can think of that need to be addressed to help Delaware Tech keep its student population?

Appendix B

Academic Advising Survey

I am the first in my family to attend college

_____ yes _____ no

_____ I have never gone to see my advisor; therefore I cannot answer these questions.

Please answer the following questions based on your experiences with your advisor.

Use the following rating scale:

A = Excellent

B = Above Average

C = Average

D = Below Average

F = Poor

- _____ 1. Approachable and receptive to my needs and concerns
- _____ 2. Accessible during regular office hours or by appointment
- _____ 3. Someone with whom I feel I can talk freely
- _____ 4. Concerned about and takes an interest in me as an individual
- _____ 5. Helps me to understand and be informed about academic requirements
- _____ 6. Knowledgeable about academic courses, programs, and procedures
- _____ 7. Provides accurate appropriate information about my interest areas and major
- _____ 8. When necessary, refers me to the appropriate person, office, or resource
- _____ 9. Facilitates my self-understanding of my abilities, interests, and potential
- _____ 10. Encourages my growth and development as a student and individual
- _____ 11. Discusses my academic goals and progress toward these goals
- _____ 12. Discusses my long-range career goals
- _____ 13. Respects my right to make my own decisions
- _____ 14. Sees advising as a cooperative effort

_____15. Has a positive constructive attitude toward working with me as an advisee

Questions / Responses of first generation college students:

1. Approachable and receptive to my needs and concerns
A. 33.33% B. 30.00% C. 33.33% D. 3.33% E. 0.00%
2. Accessible during regular office hours or by appointment
A. 13.33% B. 46.67% C. 26.67% D. 6.67% E. 6.67%
3. Someone with whom I can talk freely
A. 26.67% B. 20.00% C. 36.67% D. 6.67% E. 10.00%
4. Concerned about and takes an interest in me as an individual
A. 20.00% B. 30.00% C. 30.00% D. 13.33% E. 6.67%
5. Helps me to understand and be informed about academic requirements
A. 20.00% B. 30.00% C. 33.33% D. 6.67% E. 6.67%
6. Knowledgeable about academic courses, program, and procedures
A. 50.00% B. 10.00% C. 20.00% D. 16.67% E. 10.00%
7. Provides accurate appropriate information about my interest areas and major
A. 26.67% B. 30.00% C. 23.33% D. 10.00% E. 10.00%
8. When necessary, refers me to the appropriate person, office or resource
A. 23.33% B. 30.00% C. 26.67% D. 10.00% E. 6.67%
9. Facilitates my self-understanding of my abilities, interests, and potential
A. 13.33% B. 33.33% C. 33.33% D. 10.00% E. 13.33%
10. Encourages my growth and development as a student and individual
A. 23.33% B. 20.00% C. 30.00% D. 16.67% E. 10.00%

11. Discusses my academic goals and progress toward these goals
 - A. 23.33%
 - B. 20.00%
 - C. 36.67%
 - D. 10.00%
 - E. 10.00%
12. Discusses my long-range career goals
 - A. 16.67%
 - B. 16.67%
 - C. 43.33%
 - D. 13.33%
 - E. 10.00%
13. Respects my right to make my own decisions
 - A. 33.33%
 - B. 26.67%
 - C. 30.00%
 - D. 6.67%
 - E. 3.33%
14. Sees advising as a cooperative effort
 - A. 20.00%
 - B. 30.00%
 - C. 30.00%
 - D. 16.67%
 - E. 3.33%
15. Has a positive constructive attitude toward working with me as an advisee
 - A. 26.67%
 - B. 23.33%
 - C. 33.33%
 - D. 13.33%
 - E. 3.33%

Academic Advising Survey for students who are non first generation:

1. Approachable and receptive to my needs and concerns
 - A. 1%
 - B. 32%
 - C. 33%
 - D. 33%
 - E. 3%
2. Accessible during regular office hours or by appointment
 - A. 3%
 - B. 26%
 - C. 28%
 - D. 45%
 - E. 1%
3. Someone with whom I feel I can talk freely
 - A. 4%
 - B. 26%
 - C. 29%
 - D. 34%
 - E. 8%
4. Concerned about and takes an interest in me as an individual
 - A. 5%
 - B. 25%
 - C. 29%
 - D. 36%
 - E. 7%
5. Helps me to understand and be informed about academic requirements
 - A. 7%
 - B. 32%
 - C. 29%
 - D. 33%
 - E. 5%
6. Knowledgeable about academic courses, programs, and procedures
 - A. 8%
 - B. 37%
 - C. 34%
 - D. 26%
 - E. 3%

7. Provides accurate appropriate information about my interest areas and major
A. 9% B. 33% C. 34% D. 26% E. 7%
8. When necessary refers to the appropriate person, office or resource
A. 11% B. 28% C. 33% D. 3% E. 4%
9. Facilitates my self-understanding of my abilities, interests, and potential
A. 12% B. 21% C. 34% D. 36% E. 7%
10. Encourages my growth and development as a student and individual
A. 13% B. 32% C. 30% D. 30% E. 7%
11. Discusses my academic goals and progress toward these goals
A. 14% B. 28% C. 21% D. 25% E. 11%
12. Discusses my long-range career goals
A. 16% B. 30% C. 30% D. 34% E. 11%
13. Respects my right to make my own decisions
A. 17% B. 36% C. 30% D. 25% E. 8%
14. Sees advising as a cooperative effort
A. 18% B. 24% C. 39% D. 29% E. 5%
15. Has a positive constructive attitude toward working with me as an advisee
A. 20% B. 32% C. 33% D. 32% E. 3%

Appendix C

Dear Colleague,

I am using this information for my dissertation. Please fill out and return to me by May 31, 2006.

Thanks,
Jill Biden

Faculty Survey

1. Do you see student retention as a problem that needs to be addressed @ DTCC?

Yes _____ No _____

2. In your opinion, approximately what percentage of students drop out of your classes each semester?

+75% _____ 75% _____ 50% _____ 33% _____ 25% _____
10% _____ lower _____

3. Why do you feel most students drop out of DTCC? (Check all that apply)

_____ difficulty of material
_____ stress
_____ illness
_____ family problems
_____ work-related problems
_____ underprepared
_____ other

4. In your opinion, what factors would influence students to stay in school at DTCC? (Check all that apply).

_____ a. on site daycare
_____ b. mentoring by faculty
_____ c. increased financial aid
_____ d. psychologist on campus
_____ e. more diversity in class population
_____ f. tutoring
_____ g. more social activities on campus
_____ h. grouping students by cohorts
_____ i. student center
_____ j. better advising
_____ k. other

5. What one factor would have the greatest influence to increase student retention?

6. Would you be willing to mentor a group of students to increase student retention?

Yes _____ No _____

7. Who should be responsible for addressing student retention?

_____ faculty _____ administration _____ student retention committee
_____ counselor _____ all of the above

8. Is health care coverage a factor in student retention? In other words, do students enroll primarily for health care coverage and then drop out?

Yes _____ No _____

9. Additional comments:

1. Do you see student retention as a problem that needs to be addressed at DTCC?

Yes 87% No 7%

4 did not answer this question.

2. In your opinion, approximately what percentage of students drop out of your classes each semester?

Three quarters = 0 One half = 16% One third = 17%

One quarter = 28% Ten percent = 23% Lower than ten percent = 12%

Additional comments on this question:

- depends on which class
 - CHM 100 – 10%
 - CHM 110 – 50%
 - CHM 115 - <10%
 - CHM 2XX - <10%

- varies by semester
- 50% - 1st year; 25% second year
- 33% but higher in lower level classes
- I am faculty in the department of NSG – There is a loss of 35% of students starting the clinical component
- In lower level classes 33-50%; lower in adv.classes

3. Why do you feel most students drop out of DTCC (Check all that apply)

- 52% difficulty of material
- 39% stress
- 30% illness
- 78% family problems
- 70% work related problems
- 72% underprepared
- 28% other

Additional comments:

- need to work for health insurance coverage
- related courses allow students to take the exams until they are successful – this impacts study habits
- don't want to put in the time to do work correctly
- an early low test score will cause them to drop
- work ethic
- not willing to put in time and effort to be successful
- financial
- many students underestimate the amount of work in one class (think high school)
- schedule too heavy when taking a 5 credit lab
- not emotionally or intellectually prepared
- medical insurance
- not what they thought it would be
- semester too long
- lack of study skills and test taking ability
- students are not as prepared by high schools
- overestimate ability to work full time, go to school full time and deal with family
- trying to work, have a family life, and school

4. In your opinion, what factors would influence students to stay in school at DTCC?

(Check all that apply).

- 64% a. on site daycare
- 43% b. mentoring by faculty
- 35% c. increased financial aid
- 61% d. psychologist on campus
- .02% e. more diversity in classroom population
- 55% f. tutoring
- 12% g. more social activities on campus
- .09% h. grouping students by cohorts
- 25% i. student center
- 51% j. better advising
- 26% k. others:
 - reading specialist
 - we need a “reading week” at 8th week to help students catch up
 - more diversity in faculty
 - health insurance
 - help students understand time commitment when they go to college
 - weekend college
 - better study skills
 - decrease work hours
 - success breeds success – better study skills
 - counselors, not psychologist
 - motivation
 - teach students how to study
 - one-on-one counseling

Additional Comments:

- more equal advising, some advisors have 20 students, others have 200.

- fix registration process
- identify and address behavioral issues that impede success
- more consistent advising
- aggressive marketing of tutor help
- basic skills insufficient
- psychologist and paired with a mentor
- psychologist a must
- they don't use the help we already provide, more help is not the answer. Too much damage done in pre college years
- psychologist is needed
- a formalized 3 year or even 4 year plan for some programs. I'm dreaming, but a lot of these young people need time off to decide why they're in college

5. What one factor would have the greatest influence to increase student retention?
(Numbers to the left represent this response was indicated more than once)

- 2 proper placement
developmental/intrusive advising
counseling
- 2 required orientation
- 2 more reliable placement testing
college supported housing
- 5 mentoring
help students gain realistic expectations
a week off in middle of semester
keeping them involved with courses
- 3 better advising
clean facility and friendly campus
- 2 combination of factors
restructuring American education system
- 7 mandatory study skills/better preparation
- 4 money/financial aid
working less
more weekend courses
a study of retention
childcare
- 2 free tuition like nursing from grant money
success in classes
provide more student employment
family support
every employee truly taking pride in doing the best work possible
student referral

- 2 admission exam for oversubscribed programs
- psychologist on site
- marketing
- only accepting students who appear committed
- 4 easy access to health benefits
- cohesiveness of students through cohorts

6. Would you be willing to mentor a group of students to increase retention?

Yes 68% No 22%

Additional comments:

- I already am a mentor
- It's a wonderful idea, but SLOA etc. leave little time
- Maybe

7. Who should be responsible for addressing student retention?

.05% faculty .04% administration .09% student retention committee
 13% counselors 80% all of the above

Additional comments:

- Each student [should be responsible]
- Retention committee needs to set up a plan

8. Is healthcare coverage a factor in student retention? In other words, do students enroll primarily for healthcare coverage and then drop out?

Yes 67% No 26%

Additional comments:

I strongly suspect so due to comments I hear during registration also, discounts on auto insurance given to students
 no question [that healthcare is a factor]

3 not sure

full time students have to work for health care coverage while taking classes

health insurance is an issue, but because they need to work too many hours to maintain their coverage and thus are unsuccessful in their courses

2 Some do but this is a yes/no question

A small number do; my goal is to motivate them to stay in the class

9. Additional comments: (written exactly as expressed by instructors) and Analysis

“Our students aren’t prepared to deal with the college experience: How to thrive in a classroom isn’t a provided resource.”

“Many of our student come to us without the necessary skills to succeed.”

“I believe students do not have good study skills and lack basic skills in reading and math. Those that have a good foundation are generally successful. Many come from dysfunctional home environments – domestic violence issues. The students are unable to put the time and effort required due to family situations.”

Appendix D

Dear Colleague,

I am using this information for my dissertation. Please fill out and return to me by May 31, 2006.

Thanks,
Jill Biden

Counselor Survey

1. Do you see student retention as a problem that needs to be addressed @ DTCC?
Yes _____ No _____

2. Why do you feel most students drop out of DTCC? (Check all that apply)
_____ difficulty of material
_____ stress
_____ illness
_____ family problems
_____ work-related problems
_____ underprepared
_____ other

3. In your opinion, what factors would influence students to stay in school at DTCC? (Check all that apply).
_____ a. on site daycare
_____ b. mentoring by faculty
_____ c. increased financial aid
_____ d. psychologist on campus
_____ e. more diversity in class population
_____ f. tutoring
_____ g. more social activities on campus
_____ h. grouping students by cohorts
_____ i. student center
_____ j. better advising
_____ k. other

4. What one factor would have the greatest influence to increase student retention?

5. Who should be responsible for addressing student retention?

_____ faculty _____ administration _____ student retention committee
_____ counselor _____ all of the above

6. Is health care coverage a factor in student retention? In other words, do students enroll primarily for health care coverage and then drop out?

Yes _____ No _____

7. Additional comments:

1. All 6 counselors stated that student retention was a problem that needed to be addressed at Delaware Tech. One counselor stated that this problem was already being addressed through the Retention Task Force.

2. Although the counselors do not teach classes, most estimated that 25-33 percent of students dropped out of classes.

3. Why do most student drop out of DTCC? (Numbers to the left indicate repeat responses)

2 difficulty of material

3 stress

1 illness

2 family problems

3 work related problems

5 underprepared

2 other: time management

lack of outside support

relocation , incarceration, unemployment

Additional comments:

- don't know. data not available

4. In your opinion, what factors would influence student to stay in school at DTCC?

(Check all that apply).

- 3 a. on site daycare
- 5 b. mentoring by faculty
- 4 c. increased financial aid
- 5 d. psychologist on campus
- 0 e. more diversity in class population
- 3 f. tutoring
- 4 g. more social activities on campus
- 3 h. grouping students by cohorts
- 3 i. student center
- 1 j. better advising
- k. other: follow up by counselors

Additional Comments:

- I haven't seen diversity as a reason for someone to leave
- Increase club participation
- Perhaps more encouragement by advisors

5. What one factor would have the greatest influence to increase student retention?

- They need to feel connected to the school
- Money related issues is probably #1. This includes financial aid awards, more assistance of financial aid for the novice, perhaps

creative payment process.

- Student Center. Students need to feel they are wanted and matter. They have nowhere to go to interact and get to know one another. We provide no student centered environment.
- pre-college skill building – summer enrichment or structured developmental program
- evening food service

6. Would you be willing to mentor a group of students to increase student retention?

Yes: 2 No: (three counselors did not see/fill out the back page)

7. Who should be responsible for addressing student retention?

2 faculty 2 administration 1 student retention committee

2 counselor 1 all of the above

8. Is health care a factor in student retention? In other words, do students enroll primarily for health care coverage and then drop out?

Yes: 2 No: _____

1 not sure, but may be a factor

9. Additional Comments:

Many students have financial issues –

1. Advertise the scholarships we have – make sure they are awarded
2. Increase part-time technology related employment possibilities - this could be done as a collaboration between instructional departments.
3. Increase the number of student activities to help a student want to come/feel more connected.

Appendix E

Full-time English Instructors of Pre Tech Students/Interview

Students test into pre-tech classes through the college placement test and must complete courses in math and English before moving up to college level content courses. Because full-time English instructors are integral to the success and/or failure of pre-tech students, they were asked to participate in an informal group discussion regarding their thoughts and opinions regarding pre-tech students and student retention:

Jill: What characteristics do you feel define Del Tech's pre-tech students?

Carol: Underprepared.

Mary: First generation.

Carol: Need to work.

Jeanne: Overwhelmed with other life responsibilities. They don't understand the rigors of college and what it means to go to college.

Eric: Definitely needy students

Jill: What is the reading level, do you feel, of most pre tech students?

Eric: I know certainly below a 12th grade level.

Carol: I'm guessing junior high level. Middle school. I wish we really has an answer to that because we still don't know what that CPT score relates to in terms of what grade level.

Mary: I bet you could find that one out, though.

Eric: When I would give the Gates [Gates-McGinitie] . . .

Mary: You could find the equivalent. What the range is for those students who tested into pre-tech.

Eric: I might be mistaken, but I think the parameters we use in pre tech, 51-77, I think that's a little too broad because if you have someone who scored in the 50s, that's a different student than someone who scored into the 70s.

Carol: And do you know what that equates to?

Eric: Um, I don't know what the CPT test equates to, but I know I've started giving the option of the Gates-McGinitie that will actually put them in high school year, 10th grade, 3rd month. What I see is mostly 10th grade, some 11th grade, but I don't see anyone really aceing just that test . . . If they fail it, that person just wasn't ready that morning to take the CPT or didn't take it seriously.

Jill: But, who are you giving the Gates-McGinitie to?

Eric: I used to give it to all the sections, but it created for a very awkward situation because when I made it mandatory, um, the problem was the majority of the students in the class didn't do well, and then I would give a phone call [to the one who did] and the other students would know they didn't do well, and it was the first day. It was starting off the semester negative. And then for those who did pass it maybe two or three, it was a real challenge finding a Critical Reading and Thinking class that was open, other than the telecourse, which I don't really think would have been the best bet for them. So, what I did this past two semesters is I made it an option and listed the open Critical Reading and Thinking classes on the board, and I explained about the test and made it an option. I found that only a handful of students wanted to take it. The reason I brought it back

is that from counseling, some students would come in, for example, two semesters ago, two of my classes, had heard nothing about the challenge exam given on the first day of pre tech reading. But one class, they all knew about it, so it led to a very awkward situation. So I decided, okay, I'll make this an option for everybody. . . and to be honest, what I like about it, what I don't like about it, and at the very least, I can list the open sections. So, if you take it and you pass, here's how your schedule will have to change. So, it's a chain of events – if one thing changes, a list of things will change, so I do make it an option. This past semester, I made it an option for all three classes. The semester before, a few people took it.

Jill: Alright, so if we have such a low reading level, do you think that Del Tech should employ a reading specialist?

Mary, Carol,
Jeanne: Absolutely.

Eric: I had a question about that actually. To help the students or to help the instructors? I'm not sure . . .

Jill: I guess a reading specialist could do both; that's what they do – work with students and instructors.

Eric: Yeah, then I think that would be beneficial.

Carol: Should that person be part of our department and an instructor or are you thinking of that person in a different capacity?

Jill: Well, I'm asking what you thought. What do you think? I do have my certificate as a reading specialist, and I think you do, don't you, Jeanne?
No?

Carol: I think for an instructor, one of the hires we will look at, maybe we could look for a specialty.

Jill: I know during desegregation, a lot of teachers went for their degrees as a reading specialists because they were being hired, and it really ensured you a job. I don't know if, anymore, many people are going into that.

Eric: I knew a few . . . it used to be popular, but it seems to be waning.

Mary: I see a lot of applications for adjunct employment or full time employment and they are very few people who have master's degrees in reading. But, when they do, I like that because that's such a specialized field, it's hard to find someone who is trained to teach reading. We just hired one this summer, actually, who's – that's what caught my eye – is that she has a master's in reading.

Jill: You know I have been teaching the student population of pre tech for about two years now, and we lose about one third of our students. In your opinion, what could we do to increase student retention?

Mary: Better advisement.

Carol: Just support overall. I don't think we offer enough support or enough of the right kinds of support.

Mary: But don't you find . . . I always find on the first day of class, particularly pre-tech classes, I say to the students, "What other classes are you taking? How many hours a week are you working?" Invariably they are taking a full time load, they have children, they are not prepared for college, and they are also working – 30, 40 sometimes more hours a week. It's

ridiculous. If they were better advised, I think, to take one class at a time, until they get used to the college atmosphere, and the workload, I think that would help them a lot. I think a lot of them get to half way through the semester where they just give up because they are so overwhelmed with everything they have to do. But, if they had been better advised, um . . .

Jill: So, is that the counselors' responsibility, or should we set up a mentoring program? I mean, how do you feel about that?

Kristen: Individual attention like that would really make a big difference. They just get lost . . .

Jeanne: But I do it every semester, and I say, "Where to you have time study?" They don't understand that they have to have that time set aside every day.

Mary: Well, that goes back to what we said before, too; they are underprepared. They don't have any idea.

Jeanne: Exactly – they don't . . .

Mary: Like in their journals, I have an entry that says, I ask them if Delaware Tech was what they thought it would be. Invariably, they said it is much harder – much harder.

Eric: You know I agree with you there. The courses I taught for Mt. Pleasant this year gave me some real insight to who I am meeting here at Del Tech. Um, and these were high school students; the majority of these students were coming to a community college – there were only ten of them – but, again, when I came in, and they did place into our Critical Reading class.

But their high school efforts really fell far short of my expectations, and they said, well, we just handed in our senior research papers. And, I was surprised that at just what they were doing. I could see some of the problems that they might have in the future, especially in our comp. classes, but again just looking at the population of people we would be getting, I thought, wow, they are underprepared, and this will be a shock for them.

Jill: Isn't Critical Reading and Thinking supposed to address part of that with study skills?

Eric: Yeah.

Jill: Well, do you think that's too late because they get that after the pre-tech?

Eric: Well, that's all we do in Pre-Tech and that's all they do in Basic, and I see as far as this retention, students complaining well, this book here is what we did in basic reading. Then they get another skills book in Critical Reading, and they're all very similar. I think that could be looked at – the sequencing that we do this with one book harder than the others. Is it harder than what they are getting?

Jeanne: In Critical Reading, too, we don't spend a great deal of time on study skills. We spend time on paragraphs. So, it's addressed basically at the beginning of the semester.

Jill: In pre tech writing, I really don't do study skills.

Jeanne: The only thing I do is time control because in the beginning, they need to know . . . That's the only thing.

Jill: Do you think we should incorporate them in the first week or two of the semester? Both pre tech writing and reading?

Eric: In pre-tech reading, in my opinion, that's all we do all semester. In and out. Sometimes it's a hard sell. Sometimes it comes down to this will work, but it's hard to convince them that they actually need it.

Jill: I agree.

Eric: On occasion, someone will say, "I developed my paragraphs, and this test was easy." I'll be mid semester, and I'll be like, "thank you." But that's what we've been going for – we address it in and out. We have a new book that addresses it [study skills] even more thoroughly than the last one. We meet with a majority of our adjuncts, and we'll all be pretty much on the same page – that is what we have to do.

Jeanne: One other thing that would help, perhaps, would be some kind of daycare. I don't know that it would be a major, major help, but it would help in some instances.

Eric: Sure.

Jeanne: A lot of times they aren't there because the children are sick or the person who takes care of them is sick. So, I don't know.

Jill: Well, if we could make one change that would change student retention? What would be that one thing that I could say to Fran and to the administration that through my doctoral studies, this is the one thing that I found . . . what would you all say?

Jeanne: Proper advisement.

Carol: If they required of all students a first year course. An introduction . . .

Mary: There is a course like that . . .

Carol: But, it's not required . . .

Mary: No, it's not required. Right.

Carol: They should require it of pre-tech students

Mary: That Mastering College Life is the one.

Jill: Right.

Mary: Students who have taken it have said that it's pretty helpful.

Jill: That's the one the counselors teach?

Mary: And they cover study skills and all that stuff . . .

Jill: What would you say, Kristin?

Kristin: I was going to say counseling or advisement, but I'd say specifically that first year students need to be on par with what they need to be doing. But, that Mastering College Life course, if that were required, that would be a big change, too.

Eric: More coordination between pre-tech instructors and counselors. We need mandatory counseling. For example, if the students scores a C in the pre-tech class, that's a red flag.

Mary: It's significant.

Jill: I agree.

Eric: I know when we visited The Community College of Philadelphia and looked at their program, um, their registration was locked. They couldn't

register for the next course until they spoke to a counselor about why the
C. Was it a lack of effort or a real learning problem?

Jill: But what did they do to remediate if it was a learning problem?

Eric: It's been so long I don't remember, but I know the way they ran the program, they had a program coordinator, and he used English teachers. He didn't have his own faculty or staff. But, he was very much on top of things. I also know, and I am not suggesting this, but if they failed two remedial courses, they had to wait a year to move on. There was no just taking them over and over again. He also stressed a lot of rules, and there's something I liked: there's no late registration for pre tech courses. A student can't miss the first week. There's no taking a week off mid-semester . . . it's not feasible. Another thing with instructors – if they give them a ten minute break, then they lock the door and don't let them in. They [students] need a rigid system. They need to learn what is expected of them. I would think that what we need to do is enforce some of these rules, especially absences. We can't enforce late registration, but I know with someone who registers late, I wonder . . .

Jill: We all do. We all question why they come two weeks late.

Kristin: You were asking Eric about the remediation and if they do get a C in pre tech. Is that what you asked? That might be a situation where you might want them to meet with somebody regularly.

Carol: Or even a special section that all those people have to get funneled into.

Jill: That's a good idea. I gave you the student survey [results]. I didn't put in a lot of the demographics because I figured you knew the students anyway. But, does anything strike you, in particular, as you were reading over the academic, social, psychological, physical or financial areas?

Mary: Yes . . . that all of them felt that they were provided the support they needed to be successful.

Carol: Yes . . . we think just the opposite, as teachers, which is very interesting.

Mary: They don't really know. They think everything is fine, and this is how it's supposed to be.

Jeanne: Someone suggested the quarter system. That's interesting.

Carol: They want better parking . . .

Jill: This is only one third of the surveys that I've tallied . . .

Kristin: At first, I thought it was interesting that 19 had not used the library, but then I realized that there's so much available through the internet that they actually don't have to go to the library. I believe they should.

But I did wonder how they interpreted this. Some of them may have gone in to use the computers, so they may have interpreted this differently.

Mary: I know that all my pre-tech students have used the library but they haven't necessarily been IN the library. But they would think, well, I haven't used the library because they haven't physically gone in – but they have used the library.

Kristin: They use the vanities – that sort of thing. So it's hard to interpret that question.

Jill: One thing I was telling Carol that I thought was interesting was in the academic area, number 6: Do you think a mentor would be helpful? Most of them said yes. Then, when I asked if they would be willing to be paired with a faculty member, most of them said “no.” I mean, who did they think was going to do it.

Kristin: Yeah, a mentor would be great . . . for other people.

Jill: I really thought that was strange whether they were intimidated by faculty. But, I wonder who they thought was going to mentor them . . . other students?

Carol: Yeah.

Jill: Or students a year ahead of them? I thought . . . I didn’t know.

Mary: Under the social questions, it surprised me that Delaware Tech provided the support to thrive socially, but that so few of them attended social events.

Jill: Yeah, I know. I don’t know if that’s something wrong with the survey or with them.

Kristin: Socially, it could just mean that they are meeting friends in the hallways but they don’t go to organized events.

Jill: Well, I think that’s true for many of them.

Jeanne: They don’t have the time to do anything else. Yet, often in classes, you see friendships form.

Jill: Oh, yeah.

Mary: And I try to foster that because they need that, you know. Especially in the pre-tech classes, a lot of them don't know each other at all. And I try very hard to foster that – especially the first half of the semester – putting people in groups and making them share their journal entries – not making them but asking them to volunteer. Things just to help them to know each other so they can have their own support system in the classroom, and they do that.

Jill: Yes. Before this survey, were you aware of any student retention plan at Del Tech?

Eric: I knew that there was a retention committee.

Carol: Very little.

Kristin: Very little.

Jill: Mary?

Mary: Same. Yeah, I knew there was a retention committee.

Jill: Okay. Do you do anything as an individual to help increase student retention? What are some of the things that you do?

Carol: Recommending tutoring . . . the Writing Center. Recommending support services to particular students.

Jeanne: I individually talk to students who are having problems . . . informally.

Eric: Yeah.

Mary: And just as I said before, one of the reasons that I try to foster relationships in the classroom is to increase student retention because they

act as each others' cheerleaders. They understand that they're not the only people in the class who are going through what they're going through.

Eric: You know we try to form relationships. I try to focus some of their readings on the big picture – um – their academic future, job market, opportunities . . . it's part of what we do with *Newsweek*, and I relate my own stories about the troubles I had as an undergraduate. Especially in the beginning of the semester, a lot of people are surprised that, well, this guy is a teacher. He probably had it easy. I try to relate to them and talk to them about the challenges that lie ahead.

Jill: Do you have any other questions or comments. Anything you'd like to add?

Carol: We didn't talk about the psychological, physical, or financial.

Jill: Yeah, the psychological.

Carol: It looks like a big need there that needs to be met – and they recognize that, too.

Jill: I agree with that.

Carol: Look at the number of people who say that they see a lot of stress on campus.

Jill: I think that it's one of the things Kay Keenan said came out of their survey from the department chairs – that, um, especially in Criminal Justice, that was one area that really said we need a psychologist on campus. We see a big need for it.

Kristin: What happened?

Jill: What happened to the psychologist? I asked Kay, and Kay told me that the psychologist didn't have the credentials . . .

Jill: The other thing I thought was interesting in the "physical" part of the survey was about the wellness center. We give a lot of the Biden Breast Health programs through the high school wellness centers, and I've been in a lot of them. That's the kind of idea I'd like to set up here where we could address a lot of problems. Now, if you look in the literature about Del Tech, we do have a wellness center. It's made up of Catt Houser, and then the nurse, and then the fitness center. So, those three are considered to be a wellness center. If you look at our literature, we are considered to have a wellness center. But look at the numbers . . . the students have no concept of any sort of wellness center here on campus. I wonder if I asked them, "How many of you have ever visited Catt Houser's office." I wonder what they would say.

Mary: Who?

Jill: Yeah.

Carol: She puts out copies of things, but they are aimed at the faculty.

Jill: I don't know her title. Does anybody? Wellness Center Coordinator?

Mary: It's something like that.

Carol: I have no idea.

Jill: That was an interesting thing. And, I thought that the alcoholism – how many people saw alcoholism as a problem on campus. I've seen it a couple of times. Have you seen it a lot?

Carol: I've had it with several students, but not a lot. The drug addiction is low, and I would think that might be higher.

Jill: I would have, too.

Carol: And anger [as an issue] . . .

Jill: I thought that was interesting, too. Well, thank you. I appreciate it.

Analysis:

The common thread that runs through what all faculty and pre-tech English faculty, in particular, are saying is that students are lacking study skills. This lack of how to study and organize hinders their success in all subject areas. Faculty seem to support the idea that the course Mastering College Life should be made mandatory for all first year students. This foundation, then, would help students to understand how to succeed in their coursework.

To increase student retention, instructors suggest a variety of academic support services, but many resources are not used due to the time factor. In addition, other support services, such as a psychologist on campus, were strongly urged. Physical supports, such as daycare and a wellness center were suggested to improve the students' quality of life at Delaware Tech.

Counselors should be available to closely monitor a student's progress or failure. Grouping of like students would help instructors to address certain classes with similar problems or disabilities. With more refined tests and measures, students could also be grouped according to reading levels and ability.

The full-time English department instructors support the idea of mentoring students to improve retention. They were not sure whether students would be more

receptive to faculty or peer mentoring. But, it was generally agreed that students, particularly pre-tech students, need more support to be successful.

Appendix F

Pre-Tech Student Interviews: One drop out/one stop out

Two students who were in my pre tech writing class agreed to do interviews after they stopped attending. Ashley dropped out after several absences from class. Greg, who was taking my class for the second time, dropped out with only a few classes remaining. He returned in summer session to take pre tech writing for a third time. Both students had learning disabilities, but only Greg had self identified to the disabilities counselor, Rodney Reeves. Their interview follows:

Student Interview: Ashley

Jill: Ashley, why did you start pre-tech writing class three weeks late?

Ashley: Because my financial aid wasn't set up correctly and on Blackboard, it said I wasn't enrolled in classes. So, I talked to my teachers, and I went to registration and I talked to my financial aid person, and she said she was going to fix it. A couple weeks went by and she still didn't fix it, so I called her again, and she fixed it.

Jill: Okay, was that financial aid here at Del Tech?

Ashley: No, it was at the Department of Labor.

Jill: The Department of Labor? So you didn't go for financial aid at Delaware Tech, correct?

Ashley: Correct.

Jill: Why did you go to the Department of Labor?

Ashley: Because when I was in high school, I was in special ed and there was a

class that um said, they'd pay for special ed people to go to college for free.

Jill: Did you apply late, or did you get all the information in on time?

Ashley: I got all the information in on time, but when I called, um, she said she thought everything got straightened out, and she would look into it.

Jill: Okay, did she know, then, that this would make you ineligible to start school on time – that the start date was in August?

Ashley: Yes.

Jill: She did? Did she have any excuse for it?

Ashley: No.

Jill: Did you talk to a counselor here at Del Tech to help you by talking to your instructors to smooth the path for you?

Ashley: No.

Jill: How come?

Ashley: I have no idea.

Jill: Well, did you know to . . . are you the first one in your family to go to college?

Ashley: No.

Jill: So, your mom or dad could have helped you with this process.

Ashley: Mmm . . . They said it's my responsibility and I should be responsible for college.

Jill: And, how old are you?

Ashley: Twenty.

Jill: Twenty . . . okay, so you've been out for two years or did you just graduate late?

Ashley: I started at Del Tech . . . Well, I graduated in 2004, and I started at Del Tech in 2005.

Jill: And you've been going straight through?

Ashley: Yes.

Jill: Ok, when you came here, you notified both your instructors that you had problems with financial aid.

Ashley: Yes.

Jill: Alright. At that time, why didn't you join the class? Did you not have the money for the books?

Ashley: Correct.

Jill: So, how long do you think you missed for both classes you were enrolled in?

Ashley: Three weeks.

Jill: Okay, did you feel overwhelmed, then, by the time you went to the class – overwhelmed by the work you had to make up?

Ashley: Yes.

Jill: And then what was your other class?

Ashley: Pre Tech Reading.

Jill: Then you stopped attending class again. You attended for how long would you say? You think about a month? Just generally . . .

Ashley: Yeah.

Jill: Why did you stop attending class again?

Ashley: The first time I was in a fight, and I was in the hospital. The second time I got sent to Rockford [Psychiatric Hospital].

Jill: Did you notify your instructors or your counselor that you were in the hospital or that you were in the Rockford Center?

Ashley: Not until I got out.

Jill: Do you think it would have helped if we would have had a psychologist on campus for you to talk to?

Ashley: Yes.

Jill: Would you have been willing to go to him or her to talk about your problems?

Ashley: Yes.

Jill: Do you think it would help if you were paired with a mentor . . . what I mean by that is that somebody on the faculty kind of took you “under his or her wing,” and helped you and talked to your instructors, like when you were in the Rockford Center, that they could have sent you your assignments. Would that have helped?

Ashley: Yes, most definitely.

Jill: Okay, Is there anything else? I just feel that there is a disconnect between you and Del Tech. You don’t keep up with your instructors. Why don’t you call your instructors yourself? I mean, you are twenty. Why haven’t you taken on that responsibility?

Ashley: Well, when I was in Rockford, I couldn't really call anybody. I didn't have my cell phone with my numbers in it. Um, my mom didn't know where any of my school stuff was, and my dad had disarmed my car, so I couldn't even open the trunk where my schoolworks were. I didn't have any of my numbers. I was completely stranded until I actually showed up in school.

Jill: And then when you were in the fight, could you have called from the hospital? Could someone in your family have called?

Ashley: Yeah, but . . .

Jill: But, what?

Ashley: I just wasn't thinking straight.

Jill: When did you first go see Rodney Reeves?

Ashley: I haven't seen Mr. Rodney Reeves since I started or actually enrolled in. . .

Jill: Did you say 2004?

Ashley: 2005.

Jill: You actually haven't gone to see him for a year?

Ashley: Right.

Jill: Has he told your teachers that you are special ed and you need special considerations – longer times to take tests or make up work – anything like that?

Ashley: I did when I first started here, but then when I went to sign up for my classes they said . . .

Jill: Who's they?

Ashley: Sally something?

Jill: Sally Farmer?

Ashley: No, it starts with an “S”.

Jill: Okay, go ahead.

Ashley: She told me about it, and she told me if I needed any help . . . but, I just get to the point where I think I can do it all on my own. I want to prove to everybody that I can do it all on my own.

Jill: She told you about “it”? What is “it”?

Ashley: Mr. Rodney Reeves.

Jill: So, next semester, how will you handle things differently?

Ashley: I will go to Mr. Rodney Reeves and talk to him and tell him I need extra time on stuff. And, I will talk to my counselors and my instructors so they know. I think I’ve been messing up the last two semesters.

Analysis:

At this point, Ashley motioned that she wanted to talk to me, but unrecorded. She had been in the Rockford Center for a suicide attempt, and things were still not good at home. If Ashley had talked to a psychologist at Del Tech, or even to a counselor, she might have been made to see that Delaware Tech was not the right place for her. She did not have the academic skills to achieve beyond the pre-tech level. She just kept signing up for classes and then failing those classes for a myriad of reasons. She was emotionally fragile and could not possibly have handled the stress of attending school. Delaware Tech has an open door admission policy, but that does not mean that everyone can attain a college degree.

Student Interview: Greg

Jill: You dropped out of my class when you were doing fairly well . . . you were passing. All of a sudden you came to class and seemed disengaged. I felt that you weren't really in the class, that you had other things on your mind. Something was happening . . . can you tell me why – in a generic sense – you dropped out of Pre-Tech Writing?

Greg: I had – for medical reasons - I had to go to the hospital, and it ended up going into my class times on the same days so it's inconvenient, but I had to get it done.

Jill: Okay, you have Rodney Reeves as your counselor. Did you go talk to him to tell him why you were dropping out?

Greg: Mr. Burgess is my counselor.

Jill: Did you go to him and explain things?

Greg: Well, yes, I talked to him about it, but he didn't seem too . . . well, he understood I had to drop out, and – well I wasn't attending because of my medical issues.

Jill: Because these are medical things, do you think if we had had either a psychologist or a wellness center on campus, would you have gone for help before you decided to drop out?

Greg: Yes, actually, somebody from my high school told me that there was a wellness center or sport center here. That's why I came here, but then I heard we didn't have one. But, I was already signed up and everything. If there was one, I would definitely try to become a member.

Jill: How about a tutor? Did you seek out a tutor for pre-tech writing? Would that have helped you to stay in the class?

Greg: Actually, I have a campus tutor – my brother's girlfriend who's very experienced and like, she's very bright. She's studying to become a veterinarian and she passed her courses with flying colors. She taught me how to improve your grammar and improve your writing skills – she's taught me all the basics.

Jill: So, you think you have a personal tutor. But, if you would have one set up for you here, would that have enabled you to stay in pre-tech writing?

Greg: Actually, yes. I had checked with, I guess, there's someone next to Mr. Burgess who assigns tutors, and she pays them.

Jill: Right.

Greg: I guess they didn't have anything for writing – no volunteers. I asked people to volunteer to teach me, but they didn't have the time.

Jill: How about the Writing Center? Did you try that?

Greg: I did once in a while, but I felt I was doing better with my off campus tutor.

Jill: You missed the midterm. I was surprised you didn't contact me because you came to class almost every day. You were pretty diligent.

Greg: That's when I started having problems, and I started having appointments. I had to go to the hospital and get checked out.

Jill: Up until the midterm, you were doing your work – you were passing at midterm. Was there some reason you didn't come to me?

Greg: There were other things on my mind. I was behind in chemistry – then I got behind in writing. No offense, I just thought I'd do better in chemistry than writing, and I thought it would be impossible, I guess, to make it up.

Jill: I seem to remember from last semester that you have learning disabilities – ADHD – is that correct?

Greg: ADD – my brother has ADHD; my sister is normal.

Jill: So, in your courses, you've been able to take longer time to take tests, right? And has someone taken notes for you?

Greg: I take my own notes, but my off campus tutor reformats my notes to where it's more understandable.

Jill: Do you plan to take pre-tech writing next semester?

Greg: Oh, yes, if actually, I had a question about that, I was actually wondering would they cancel or would it affect my GPA if I fail a class twice?

Jill: Only if you fail it three times.

Greg: I was trying to find the answer.

Jill: When you come back again, are you going to try to get the services you can get?

Greg: Yes, I actually plan to schedule when I can go to the Writing Center or my off campus tutor or if they have one available here.

Analysis:

Greg could have benefited from an on campus tutor. He was lacking in organizational skills, and he asked for clarification of assignments two and three times during class. Assignments are always spoken, then written on the board, and given again

in Blackboard in an attempt to accommodate all learning styles. He was often confused, and he never handed in class work during class time. He also redid his work at home – probably with the help of his tutor. A mentor could have given him further encouragement. Yet, it will be interesting to see if he can handle regular college level coursework.

