BEST PRACTICES IN ONLINE STUDENT RETENTION

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In the following report, Hanover Research reviews effective practices in retaining online students. The report also benchmarks common online support services and academic metrics across 18 institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Though the number of students enrolling in online coursework continues to increase across the United States, the attrition rate for online courses remains significantly higher than for their onsite counterparts. Some estimates suggest the attrition rate for online courses is as high as 20 to 50 percent.[1] As online learning claims a larger percentage of total student enrollments, higher education administrators are under increasing pressure to ensure online students persist – and succeed. Accordingly, this report reviews effective practices for online student retention. The report is divided into the following two sections.

- **Section I** provides a literature review that summarizes the factors affecting online student retention, which students are at the highest risk of attrition, and effective practices for retaining online students.

- **Section II** benchmarks online student support services and other practices across 18 institutions, including traditional universities and those with a large number of online programs.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Research indicates that retention rates for online courses are roughly 10 to 20 percent lower than for face-to-face courses**. According to the Online Learning Consortium's most recent survey of over 2,800 U.S. colleges and universities, 45 percent of chief academic officers agreed that retaining students was more difficult in online than in face-to-face courses. This sentiment is more prevalent now than it was a decade ago.

- **Student persistence in online courses is influenced by many factors, including personal motivation and study habits, engagement with course content and the university in general, and the perceived quality of the education students are receiving.** While institutions often cannot control for the personal factors that influence retention, they should work to ensure that students feel connected to the institution and that they believe their courses are high-quality. For that reason, many of the most popular retention strategies today are designed to promote academic and social integration among students and to guarantee timely and actionable feedback from faculty.

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[1] Hill, C. "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," in "Strategies for Increasing Online Student Retention and Satisfaction." Faculty Focus, p. 10-11.
http://www.occc.edu/aphilipp/online/Online_Retention.pdf

- **Students with limited university-level experience, low prior academic performance, previous withdrawals from online courses, or no prior online learning experience are at heightened risk of attrition**. Institutions may therefore wish to target retention efforts to students with one or more of these characteristics.

- **Convenience and flexibility remain important considerations for online learners.** The quality of an institution's support services does not matter if they are not available when students need them. To accommodate the schedules of online learners, institutions should work to make technical and tutoring support available to online learners 24/7, potentially by partnering with a third-party provider.

  o **While 24/7 live technology support is an ideal, most of the institutions benchmarked in this report do not provide such constant service.** Of the 18 institutions reviewed for this report, fewer than four provide on-demand technology support at all hours. Instead, most colleges and universities provide technology support through a campus help desk during extended business hours, and may provide tutorials, email support, or a ticketing system during off hours.

  o **Alternatively, the majority of benchmarked institutions have begun offering 24/7 tutoring support for at least some subjects through third-part providers.** Services such as SmarThinking, ThinkingStorm, and Tutor.com have grown in recent years as a means of providing readily accessible tutoring for high school and college students through web-supported chat and video conferencing. Many institutions contract with these companies to provide free tutoring to their students as a means of improving student success.

SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature related to online student retention, focusing on the practices that have been shown to create positive retention outcomes in fully online courses and degree programs. The section begins with a discussion of several factors underlying the high attrition rates among online students.

FACTORS AFFECTING RETENTION RATES FOR ONLINE STUDENTS

With retention rates for online courses roughly 10 to 20 percent lower than for face-to-face courses, improving persistence levels of online learners is one of the key challenges for online educators in the United States.[2] According to the Online Learning Consortium's most recent survey of representatives from over 2,800 U.S. colleges and universities, 45 percent of chief academic officers agreed that retaining students was more difficult in online than in face-to-face courses.[3] Interestingly, though online education has been increasing in popularity over the past several years, a smaller percentage of chief academic officers agreed with this statement a decade ago, as shown in Figure 1.1 below.[4]

Figure 1.1: Chief Academic Officers Agreeing with the Statement "Retaining Students is a Greater Problem for Online Courses than it is for Face-to-Face Courses"
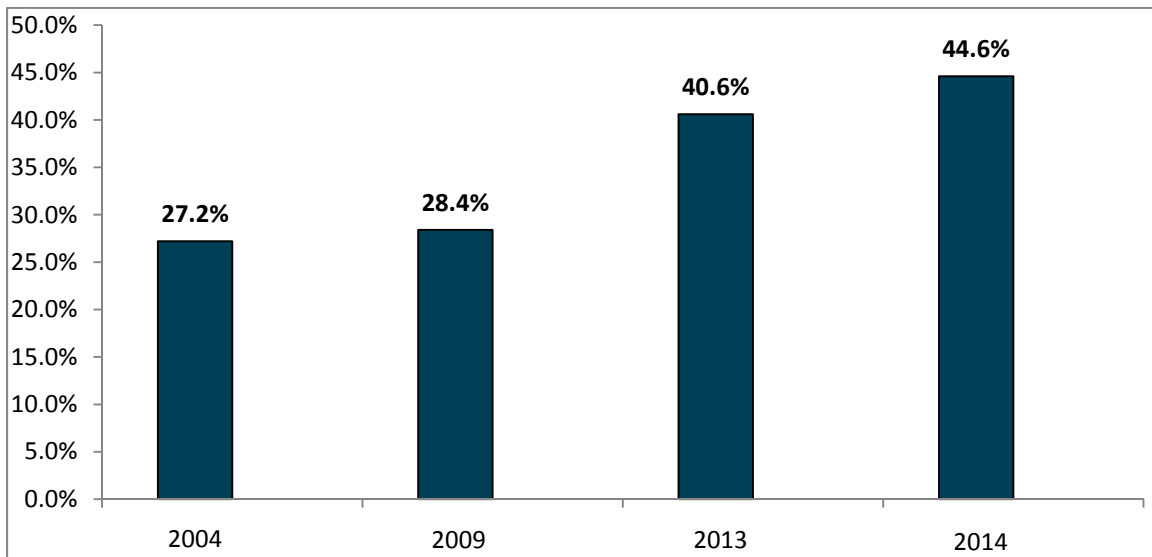
Source: The Online Learning Consortium[5]

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[2] [1] Angelino, L., F. Williams, and D. Natvig. "Strategies to Engage Online Students and Reduce Attrition Rates." *The Journal of Educators Online*, July 2007. http://www.thejeo.com/Volume4Number2/Angelino%20Final.pdf [2] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit.

[3] Allen, E. and J. Seaman, "Grade Level: Tracking Online Education in the United States." Online Learning Consortium. February 2015, p. 24-25. http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradelevel.pdf

[4] Ibid.

[5] Figure reproduced from: Ibid, p. 24.

WHY STUDENTS LEAVE

A great deal of research on the causes of attrition in higher education draws from a model created by Vincent Tinto in the 1980s.[6] Tinto's model proposes that student persistence is influenced by a variety of personal and institutional factors, including family background, personal motivation, previous educational experience and achievement, and institutional support. His work also suggests that "**institutions should focus on the degree to which the learner is able to be socially and academically integrated with peers and the institution, as a way of ensuring retention**."[7] Many online retention strategies popular today are designed to promote academic and social integration among students, particularly those at highest risk of dropping out. Despite the challenges inherent in forming connections to professors and peers in an environment where students are often unable to physically interact, providing a sense of "virtual community" can build a sense of camaraderie and emotional support that can help online students feel less isolated and better manage setbacks.[8]

However, Tinto conducted his research among campus-based undergraduates, who tend to be quite different from the typical online learner. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 70 percent of U.S. online learners are older than 25 years old and 68 percent are employed.[9] Thus, some reasons why online students fail to persist might be very different from the reasons why on-campus undergraduates fail to persist. Namely, online learners are more likely to face competing personal responsibilities, which may hinder their ability to complete a degree or course. According to a team of researchers from the University of Illinois-Springfield:[10]

> *Online students generally are older; juggling careers, families, and college; highly focused on earning their degree; and paying most of the tuition with their own money. On-campus students generally are younger; although many work, fewer work full time; fewer are the breadwinner for families; and many have significant financial aid from sources including their parents. These varying factors may have an effect on persistence and time to degree completion.[11]*

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[6] [1] Tinto, V. "Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition." University of Chicago Press. March 1987. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED283416 [2] Tyler-Smith, K. "Early Attrition among First Time eLearners: A Review of the Factors the Contribute to Drop-out, Withdrawal and Non-completion Rates of Adult Learners undertaking eLearning Programs." *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching.* June 2006. http://jolt.merlot.org/vol2no2/tyler-smith.htm [3] Lowenthal, P. "Improving Student Retention in Online Learning." *Inside Higher Education.* May 15, 2014. https://www.insidehighered.com/audio/2014/05/15/improving-student-retention-online-learning. For accompanying slide deck, see: Lowenthal, P. "Improving Student Retention." June 10, 2014. https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/Retention-IHE-final%20(1)(1).pdf

[7] Tyler-Smith, Op. cit.

[8] [1] Hart, Op. cit., p. 35. [2] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit. [3] Lowenthal, Op. cit.

[9] Regier, P. "Using Technology to Engage the Nontraditional Student." *EDUCAUSE* Review. September 15, 2014. http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/using-technology-engage-nontraditional-student

[10] [1] Regier, Op. cit. [2] Allan and Seaman, Op. cit., p. 24-25.

[11] Boles, et. al., "Sustaining Students: Retention Strategies in an Online Program." *EDUCAUSE Review.* December 15, 2010. http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/sustaining-students-retention-strategies-online-program

As online students tend to have more competing responsibilities than traditional students, designing courses with flexible curricula and delivery systems is crucial.[12] Also important is ensuring that students can access support services at times that are convenient for them – for instance, a technical support office that is only accessible during regular school hours would not be conducive to online learners with full-time jobs.[13]

Another reason why online students may withdraw is due to the "misalignment" between what students expect online learning to be versus what online learning actually is.[14] For instance, some students elect to take an online course because they think it will be easier or less time intensive than the face-to-face version. However, in reality students usually need to be *more* disciplined to succeed in an online learning environment.[15] Therefore, experts recommend orienting students to the expectations and workload of each online course *before* the start of the semester. According to the literature, "a heavy workload is not necessarily problematic as long as students have a realistic expectation of what will be involved" and "students who actively plan to accommodate workload tend to be persistent."[16]

Beyond personal motivation levels and external circumstances, students may choose to withdraw from an online program due to the course design or quality of instruction. In a recent survey conducted by the higher education consulting firm Noel-Levitz, online student respondents rated academic quality and the timeliness of faculty feedback as areas of both high importance and low satisfaction.[17] Thus, these issues represent two of the greatest challenges of online learning.

> *Online students may withdraw due to the misalignment between what students expect online learning to be versus what online learning actually is.*

According to multiple studies, the responsiveness of online faculty members is one of the largest influencers of student satisfaction levels in online courses.[18] Students favor

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[12] Hart, Op. cit., p. 30.

[13] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit.

[14] Burnsed, B. "Curtailing Dropouts at Online Universities." *U.S. News and World Report.* October 20, 2010. http://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2010/10/20/curtailing-dropouts-at-online-universities

[15] 68 percent of academic officers surveyed agreed with the statement "Students need more discipline to succeed in an online course than in a face-to-face course." See: Allen and Seaman, Op. cit., p. 23.

[16] Hart, C. "Factors Associated with Student Persistence in an Online Program of Study: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of Interactive Online Learning,* p. 31. http://itecideas.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/58620369/Factors%252520Associated%252520With%252520Student%252520Persistence%252520in%252520an%252520Online%252520Program%252520of%252520Study.pdf

[17] Bryan, J. and M/ Adkins. "Online Student Readiness and Satisfaction Within Subpopulations." Noel-Levitz and Smarter Services. 2013, p. 1. https://www.noellevitz.com/documents/shared/Papers_and_Research/2013/2013_OnlineStudentReadiness.pdf
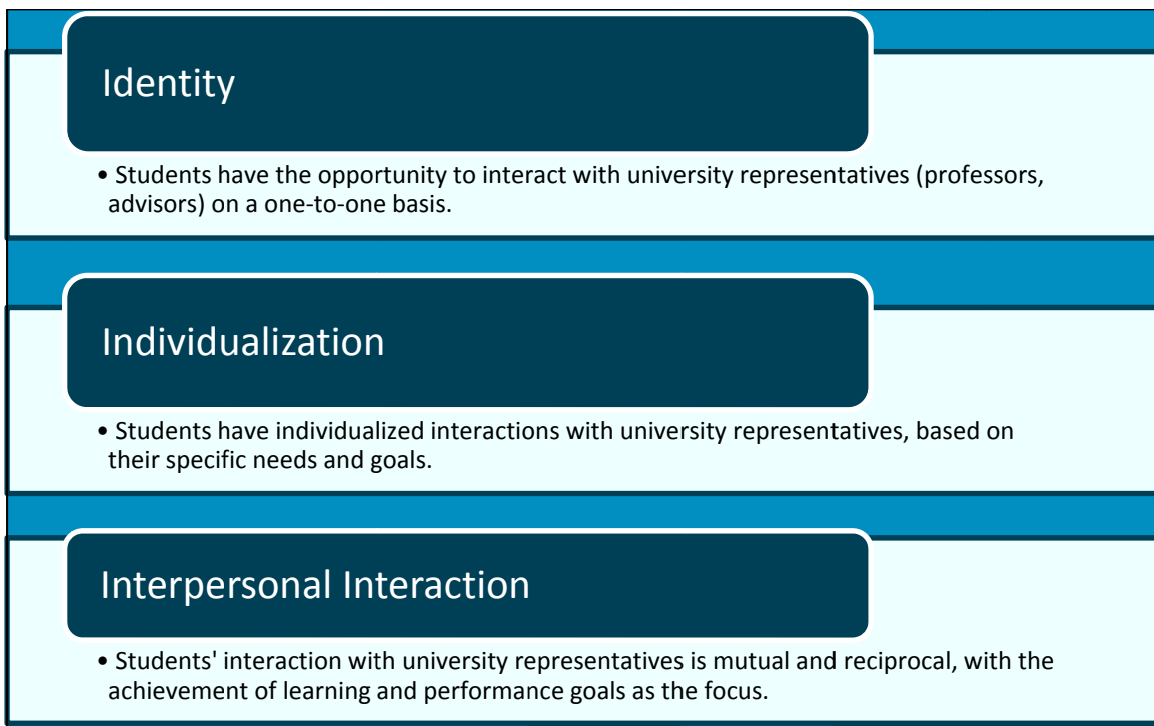
[18] See: [1] Herbert, M. "Staying the Course: A Study in Online Student Satisfaction and Retention." *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration.* Winter 2006. http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter94/herbert94.htm [2] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit.

professors who answer questions quickly and who give feedback about student progress that is individualized, clear, and quickly turned around. Professors who are better able to engage their online learners, both at an individual and classroom level, have better success in retaining them.[19] However, an academic program's perceived quality is not a function of the teaching faculty alone. The institution itself has a responsibility to ensure that courses offered online have been well selected, that they are adapted to fit an online learning environment, and that the professors teaching them are trained in effective online-specific teaching strategies.[20]

A recurring theme across these various factors of online retention is student engagement. According to a commonly cited review of the influencers of online persistence rates, "engaging students as early as possible and keeping them engaged is the key."[21] In particular, retention models stress the following integrated forms of student-institution engagement as contributing to persistence (see figure 1.2 below). Many of the effective retention strategies discussed in the remainder of this section seek to foster these three types of engagement.

Figure 1.2: Model of Student-Institution Engagement

Identity
- Students have the opportunity to interact with university representatives (professors, advisors) on a one-to-one basis.

Individualization
- Students have individualized interactions with university representatives, based on their specific needs and goals.

Interpersonal Interaction
- Students' interaction with university representatives is mutual and reciprocal, with the achievement of learning and performance goals as the focus.

Source: *EDUCAUSE Review*[22]

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[19] [1] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit. [2] Hart, Op. cit., p. 33. [3] Lowenthal, Op. cit.

[20] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit.

[21] Angelino, Williams, and Natvig, Op. cit., p. 9.

[22] Dunlap, J. and Lowenthal, P. "Defeating the Kobayashi Maru: Supporting Student Retention by Balancing the Needs of the Many and the One." *EDUCAUSE Review.* December 15, 2010.

STUDENTS MOST AT RISK OF ATTRITION

In addition to studying *why* students fail to persist in online environments, researchers have also grappled with the question of *who* is most likely to withdraw. Research indicates that students with one or more of the following characteristics are at heightened risk of dropping an online course:

- **Limited university-level experience**: A recent study published in *Research in Higher Education,* which tracked online course withdrawals among undergraduate students at a large public university, found academic experience to be the best predictor of attrition. The study found that withdrawal rates were highest among first-year students and decreased incrementally for sophomores, juniors, and seniors.[23] Unsurprisingly, students who are closer to graduation are also less likely to withdraw from an online program.[24]

- **Low cumulative GPA**: Prior academic performance, as measured by GPA, is another strong predictor of a student's likelihood to withdraw.[25] In a research study led by Dr. Justin Cochran of Kennesaw State University, students with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher were shown to be more likely to persist than those with lower averages.[26] Experts surmise that students with higher GPAs are more likely to possess the study skills and self-motivation that online learning demands.[27]

- **Previous withdrawals from online courses**: Cochran's study also found previous withdrawals from online courses to be statistically significant in predicting who was more likely to withdraw from a subsequent online course.[28]

- **Youth and lack of online experience:** Data from the 2013 Noel-Levitz Online Student Readiness and Satisfaction survey indicate that younger students (24 and under) are less satisfied and less prepared for online coursework. In addition, the survey found students with no prior online learning experience to be less prepared.[29]

By knowing who is most likely to withdraw, institutions can target retention efforts to individual students or populations. For instance, because younger students with no prior online learning experience are at heightened risk of attrition, Noel-Levitz recommends that:

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http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/defeating-kobayashi-maru-supporting-student-retention-balancing-needs-many-and-one

[23] Cochran et. al., "The Role of Student Characteristics in Predicting Retention in Online Courses." *Research in Higher Education.* February, 2014.

[24] Hart, Op. cit., p. 30-31.

[25] Lowenthal, Op. cit.

[26] Cochran, Op. cit.

[27] Hart, Op. cit., p. 31

[28] Cochran, Op. cit.

[29] Bryan and Adkins, Op. cit., p. 5, 11.

> *These students should receive focused communication messages to address satisfaction issues and to establish appropriate expectations. Older, more experienced students may benefit from these efforts, but if budgets and resources are limited, then colleges and universities will want to be sure to target their efforst to the younger, less experienced student populations.*[30]

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR RETAINING ONLINE STUDENTS

The following sub-section highlights best practices for retaining students in online courses and degree programs. Many of these practices seek to address the persistence factors previously discussed – with a focus on student engagement, course quality, and institutional support. The section begins with findings from a national survey tracking the most prevalent and effective strategies private universities use to retain online students.

BENCHMARKING RETENTION PRACTICES FOR ONLINE LEARNERS

In the spring of 2013, Noel-Levitz conducted a survey of officials from nearly 200 private universities to measure the effectiveness of common strategies designed to boost undergraduate retention and completion rates.[31] Figure 1.3 displays the percentage of institutions that reported using ten different strategies specific to retaining *online* students. The figure also summarizes the perceived effectiveness of each strategy based on the percentage of respondents who rated the practice as "very effective."

According to this study, the three practices for retaining online learners that are most commonly believed to be "very effective" include:

- ✓ **Mandatory online interaction between students and faculty;**
- ✓ **Required training program for online faculty; and**
- ✓ **Technical support to address online connection issues.**

Surveyed officials were largely in agreement that mandatory interaction between students and faculty is an effective retention practice, as approximately 80 percent of respondents rated the practice at least "somewhat effective." However, requiring faculty members to undergo training prior to teaching an online course was a more divisive practice. While a large percentage of respondents found the practice to be "very effective," a slightly larger percentage considered the practice "minimally effective."

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[30] Ibid., p. 11.

[31] "Usage and Effectiveness of Practices for Retaining Online Learners for Four-Year Private Institutions" in "2013 Student Retention and College Completion Practices Report." Noel-Levitz. 2013, p. 13.
https://www.noellevitz.com/papers-research-higher-education/2013/2013-student-retention-and-college-completion-practices-report

Figure 1.3: Usage and Effectiveness of Practices for Retaining Online Learners for Four-Year Private Institutions

RETENTION STRATEGY	INSTITUTIONS USING STRATEGY	VERY EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE
Mandatory online interaction between faculty and students	54.4%	33.9%	46.4%	19.6%
Required training program for online faculty	62.6%	30.6%	37.1%	32.3%
Technical support to address online connection issues	72.4%	29.6%	49.3%	21.1%
Faculty development and support for online technology and online teaching pedagogy	73.7%	24.7%	45.2%	30.1%
Academic support services specifically for online learners	47.7%	22.6%	41.5%	35.8%
Student services geared to online learners, including registration and financial aid	53.5%	22.2%	50.0%	27.8%
Early-alert and intervention system for online learners	27.3%	18.5%	55.6%	25.9%
Orientation program for online learners	54.5%	18.2%	49.1%	32.7%
Faculty advisor assigned to each online learner	43.0%	15.2%	58.7%	26.1%
Feedback mechanisms to identify program improvements for online learners	59.2%	13.8%	46.6%	39.7%

Source: Noel-Levitz[32]

Creating feedback mechanisms to identify program improvements for online learners was considered by survey respondents to be one of the least effective retention practices in use. Less than 14 percent of respondents rated the practice "very effective" while nearly 40 percent considered it "minimally effective." This understanding notably runs counter to the academic research on the topic, which considers data gathering of multiple types to be an essential component of successful retention practice. For example, Cochran recommends that institutions follow-up with students after they first withdraw from an online class to not only "mitigate further withdrawals," but also to gain a better "understanding of withdrawal behavior within major fields of study… (to) help administrators and faculty develop strategies to increase retention rates."[33]

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN ONLINE RETENTION

Through a review of the literature, which included academic journal articles and relevant industry publications, Hanover identified a number of strategies that are consistently cited as effective in retaining online learners. This sub-section groups these strategies into three

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[32] Figure reproduced from: "Usage and Effectiveness of Practices for Retaining Online Learners for Four-Year Private Institutions," Op. cit.
[33] Cochran et. al., Op. cit. p. 42.

main categories: Faculty-Student Engagement, Course Design and Delivery, and Support Services. The majority of these strategies were designed to maximize retention among undergraduate online students; indeed, research focused on the retention of graduate students online is a gap that experts have previously noted in the literature.[34] While many of these practices are likely to provide retention benefits for students at all levels, institutions should weigh the applicability of each practice for a given audience before implementing it.

FACULTY-STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

As noted previously, online students highly value regular interaction with their professors as well as timely and personalized feedback on their progress. Faculty-student engagement can also help to mitigate the sense of isolation online students often feel and ensure their needs are being met throughout the course. Therefore, "professors who are actively engaging learners have much more success with student retention."[35] Scholars have outlined a number of "social presence" strategies for encouraging faculty-student as well as peer-peer interaction during online courses. These include:

> *Online students highly value regular interaction with their professors as well as timely and personalized feedback on their progress.*

- **Faculty Presence:** One of the most commonly cited best practices for online retention is also one of the easiest to achieve – faculty members should consistently demonstrate their presence in the online environment. Instructors should establish their availability at the outset of the course, and should clearly notify students of their preferred methods of contact and what to expect regarding responsiveness.[36] Faculty members should appear in an online course several times per week through "liberal use of communication tools such as announcements, discussion board postings, and forums."[37]

- **Orientation Exercises**: At the beginning of a new course, students should be oriented not only to the material and available resources, but also to the professor and each other. Sources recommend the use of "virtual ice breakers," student/faculty biographies, or even video in which the professor orients students to the institution's physical campus.[38]

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[34] See: Lowenthal, Op. cit.

[35] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit.

[36] Poll, K., J. Widen, and S. Weller. "Six Instructional Best Practices for Online Engagement and Retention." *Journal of Online Doctoral Education* 1 (Summer 2014). p. 61.
http://jode.ncu.edu/sites/default/files/sites/all/default/Articles/Six_Instructional_Best_Practices_for_Online_Eng agement_and_Retention_Poll_Widen_Weller_2.pdf

[37] Boettcher, J.V. "Ten Best Practices for Teaching Online: Quick Guide for New Online Faculty." Designing for Learning, Revised May 20, 2013. http://www.designingforlearning.info/services/writing/ecoach/tenbest.html

[38] [1] Lowenthal, Op. cit. [2] Angelino et. al., Op. cit.

- **Class Discussion:** Faculty should encourage class discussion and active learning whenever possible in online courses. Experts have noted the effectiveness of synchronous discussion sessions, though these come at the expense of reduced flexibility.[39] Other ways to foster discussion include: informal chat sessions, asynchronous discussion boards in which students can post comments at their convenience, and group projects.[40] Particularly in graduate degree programs, faculty can draw on the personal career experiences and unique perspectives of students through such means.[41]

- **One-on-One Communication**: It is important for faculty members to get to know students on an individual level. Several professors of online courses have qualitatively noted the effectiveness of the "five-minute phone call" in accomplishing this objective.[42] This strategy can also be used by mentors, tutors, and program coordinators, particularly if the professor does not have the time to phone everyone in the course. Other strategies to increase one-on-one communication include weekly faculty office hours and individualized e-mail responses.

- **Regular Feedback**: The importance of timely, individualized, and meaningful feedback in online courses cannot be understated. This feedback applies to both individual assignments as well as overall progress within the course.[43] As is true in an in-person setting, feedback for online assignments should contain actionable suggestions for future progress and should be delivered in enough time that it can be incorporated into the next assignment.[44] Patrick Lowenthal, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Technology at Boise State University and an expert on online education, suggests giving video feedback on select assignments to compensate online students for the lack of face-to-face feedback that students often receive in the classroom.[45]

COURSE DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Unsurprisingly, if an online course meets or exceeds students' pre-existing expectations, they are more likely to persist. Conversely, if a course fails to meet expectations or is different than what students expected, they are more likely to drop out. These best practices are meant to ensure that online coursework is convenient, engaging, and meets students' expectations.

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[39] Lowenthal, Op. cit.
[40] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit., p. 11.
[41] Boles et. al., Op. cit.
[42] See: [1] Lowenthal, Op. cit. [2] Hill, C. "Online Mentoring Builds Retention," Op. cit.
[43] See: [1] Bryan and Adkins, Op. cit. [2] Hart, Op. cit. [3] Lowenthal, Op. cit.
[44] Poll, Widen, and Weller, Op. cit., p. 65.
[45] Lowenthal, Op. cit.

- **Accelerated Format:** To accommodate the needs of non-traditional learners, an institution may consider offering accelerated online courses, which condense classes into shortened, more intensive time periods. According to the Dean of Arizona State University Online, offering online courses in a condensed format makes sense because non-traditional students "need quick wins to stay on track" and "require more flexibility and focus."[46]

- **Learning Cohorts:** Research points to the value of learning cohorts, in which students within a particular degree program progress through their coursework together.[47] In an online learning environment, cohorts can foster social engagement, helping students to feel less isolated and more supported throughout their program of study. Coastline Community College's STAR Program, which moves students through their degrees as small cohorts, is instructive. According to Coastline's manager of instructional design, Bob Nash, the program has been one of the institution's most effective techniques for improving persistence. "Just like the research tells us, it works very well… the retention numbers in that group are very high," Nash says.[48] However, while the retention benefits of learning cohorts are well established, they carry certain challenges of their own, including decreased course flexibility for students and added expense.

- **Small Class Size:** The idea that smaller class sizes improve student learning and retention for in-person courses is well-established in the academic literature.[49] However, in a market where the financial benefits of large class sizes are clear, many institutions have hesitated to enforce strict limits on online class sizes. Nonetheless, many researchers suggest that small class sizes benefit online learners by providing them with more individualized interaction and by encouraging social engagement. The benefits of this practice have been seen at the University of Illinois at Springfield, which caps many of its online courses at 25 students "allowing students and faculty to develop close relationships over the 15-week semester."[50]

- **Pre-Registration Orientation:** As discussed previously, many first-time online students drop out because their perceptions of online learning are very different than the reality of online learning. For this reason, some universities require students to complete an orientation before they are allowed to register for any online courses to ensure they understand expectations (the "hidden curriculum") from the outset.[51] A preliminary study by researchers at Kennesaw State University

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[46] Regier, Op. cit.

[47] See: [1] Angelino et. al., Op. cit. [2] Lowenthal, Op. cit. [3] Hart, Op. cit.

[48] Hill, C. "11 Tips for Improving Retention of Distance Learning Students." in "Strategies for Increasing Online Student Retention and Satisfaction." Faculty Focus, p. 4-5. http://www.occc.edu/aphilipp/online/Online_Retention.pdf

[49] See Cuseo, J. "The Empirical Case Against Large Class Size: Adverse Effects on the Teaching, Learning, and Retention of First-Year Students." *Journal of Faculty Development* (2007). https://wiki.doit.wisc.edu/confluence/download/attachments/20938768/Cuseo.pdf

[50] [1] Regier, Op. cit. [2] Lowenthal, Op. cit.

[51] [1] Burnsed, Op. cit. [2] Lowenthal, Op. cit.

also suggests that a face-to-face orientation meeting can greatly improve retention rates, although the difficulty of implementing such a program for all online learners may make such a practice unfeasible.[52]

Case Study: Boosting Online Retention Rates at the University of Illinois – Springfield

Facing major challenges with online student persistence, the University of Illinois at Springfield has implemented a variety of strategies which successfully boosted online course and degree completion rates (so that they are now only two to three percentage points below onsite completion rates). The University credits the "incorporation of online programs into the fabric of the institution" to the model's success – the majority of online instructors are tenure-track professors who also teach courses onsite and all new online programs are developed within the same academic departments as onsite programs. A few key components of the model are described below:[53]

- **Extensive Faculty Support**: Online instructors are supported by the Center for Online Learning, which provides technology training, pedagogical support, and one-on-one training sessions. Additionally, the University of Illinois offers online workshops and certificate programs through its membership in the Sloan Consortium as well as classes in online teaching development.

- **Online Program Coordinators**: Faculty are further supported by online program coordinators, who are responsible for:

    o Recruiting students
    o Tracking of student schedules and progress toward degree completion
    o Encouraging and facilitating communication between students and faculty members
    o Advocating for students in administrative and bureaucratic matters
    o Supporting students who confront individual challenges in moving toward degree completion

- **Peer mentors**: As experienced online students, peer mentors can also ease faculty workloads and provide students with additional support in online coursework through:

    o Facilitating discussions
    o Tracking participation
    o Training on classroom technologies
    o Answering questions about the course

SUPPORT SERVICES

The literature recommends a number of support services for online learners, including technical support, career counselling, registration support, and library services (See Section

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[52] Ali, R. and E. Leeds. "The Impact of Face-to-Face Orientation on Online Retention: A Pilot Study." *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration* 12 (Winter 2009).
http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter124/ali124.html
[53] Boles et. al., Op. cit. Sub-bullet points taken verbatim.

II for complete list).[54] However, the support services found to have the greatest effects on online student retention are those that contribute to academic engagement.

- **Online Faculty Training & Pedagogical Support:** Though not a support service for students, the literature consistently stresses the need for institutions to provide support to faculty members who are new to online teaching that transcends basic technology training.[55] Faculty should be taught strategies (particularly student engagement techniques) specific to teaching online and should be able to work with instructional designers when creating new online courses. The University of West Georgia, for instance, requires new-to-online faculty to take an online class about how to teach online. This gives instructors "first-hand knowledge of the frustrating road blocks online students face as they learn."[56] Effective faculty training translates to higher quality courses that are better at engaging, and retaining, online students.

- **Mentoring:** Mentors provide individualized support to online learners while tracking student progress to degree completion. Particularly in large online courses in which it is not feasible for the instructor to establish a personal relationship with every student, mentors ensure students stay motivated and socially engaged in their program of study. Unlike instructors, mentors also "know more about what is going on in that individual adult student's life," including their personal goals and potential challenges they might face.[57] Mentors can also help to connect online students to other academic support services depending upon their personal needs. The case studies included in this report – examining the University of Illinois at Springield and the University of Georgia – both demonstrate that the effective use of mentoring through program coordinators (faculty or professional staff members who act as academic advisors for students throughout their course of study) can help improve online retention rates.[58]

- **Tutoring:** Tutors have also been shown to increase the retention rates of distance learners, though limited research exists specifically for online tutoring.[59] A model that has been particularly successful is the use of course-specific peer tutors. These are often experienced online students who may assist with facilitating class discussion, tracking student participation, providing training on classroom technologies, and answering students' questions.[60] Peer tutors also help to free up

[54] Angelino, et. al., Op. cit.

[55] [1] Hill, "Eight Suggestions to Help You Get Your Retention Act Together Now," Op. cit. [2] Regier, Op. cit.

[56] Burnsed, Op. cit.

[57] Hill, C. "Taking a Holistic View of Student Retention." Faculty Focus, p. 7-9.
    http://www.occc.edu/aphilipp/online/Online_Retention.pdf

[58] [1] Hill, C. "Online Mentoring Builds Retention." Faculty Focus, p. 12-13.
    http://www.occc.edu/aphilipp/online/Online_Retention.pdf [2] Boles et. al., Op. cit.

[59] [1] Jeffs, A., J. Richardson, and L. Price. "Student and Tutor Perceptions of Effective Tutoring in Distance Education." Distance Education. Volume 30, Issue 3, November 2009.
    http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01587910903236551 [2] Hill, "11 Tips for Improving Retention in Distance Learning Students," Op. cit. [3] Boles et. al., Op. cit.

[60] [1] Hill, "11 Tips for Improving Retention in Distance Learning Students," Op. cit. [2] Boles et. al., Op. cit.

instructors' time so that they can "focus on course content and facilitation rather than routine tasks."[61] In a 2009 study tracking perceptions of effective online tutoring, students expressed a preference for tutors who could contribute subject expertise, vocational guidance, and emotional support. The study also suggested that "tutors could encourage greater retention if students were supported in their study strategies and academic integration."[62]

- **Accessibility:** Responsive and integrated student support services – including technical support services, academic support services, and financial services – contribute to student persistence. However, a key factor in delivering support services to online students is that they should be convenient, easily accessible, and available when they are needed.[63] According to a report on online student services published by the Blackboard Institute, "many institutions understand the importance of providing 24/7 technical support because students are doing coursework at all hours of the day."[64] This level of service is typically facilitated by third-party providers. Some institutions have similarly moved to implement 24/7 academic support by outsourcing the service to third-party provider such as SmartThinking.

Case Study: Online Mentoring at the University of Georgia

Students in the University of Georgia's Master of Adult Education program work with one advisor, who is a professor within the department, throughout their course of study. According to Janet Truluck, the program's director, the advisor acts as "a point person" for each entering cohort, providing students with guidance as well as social/emotional support. Most importantly, the advisor "actually knows about them and who they are and what they're trying to accomplish." According to Truluck, there are seven key components to UGA's online mentoring program:[65]

- The advisor telephones each student prior to the start of the program to establish a personal connection and alert them to program requirements and rigors.
- The advisor teaches one of the first courses in the program.
- The advisor opens a "coffee shop" in each course to foster casual discussion.
- The advisor uses WebCT tools to reach students.
- The advisor holds weekly "virtual" office hours using online chatrooms.
- The advisor telephones students again halfway through the semester to follow up on how the student is progressing and to address any potential issues.
- The advisor conducts a final exit interview at the end of the program to better understand how to improve student satisfaction moving forward.

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[61] Boles et. al., Op. cit.
[62] Jeffs, Richardson, and Price, Op. cit.
[63] Ibid.
[64] "Effective Practices Snapshot: Student Services for Online Learners." Blackboard Institute. p. 4.
    http://www.blackboard.com/cmspages/getfile.aspx?guid=749bf20b-76a2-4a7e-b56c-71ddf7ca7c05
[65] Hill, "Online Mentoring Builds Retention," Op. cit.

SECTION II: BENCHMARKING ONLINE SUPPORT SERVICES & PRACTICES

In the following section, Hanover Research provides information on the online retention practices of 18 higher education institutions. The information in this section was compiled using information published by the *U.S. News and World Report* as well as through a review of institutional websites.

Figure 2.1 displays the institutions that are included in this analysis. The list includes a range of institutions, including institutions that have historically served predominantly on-campus, traditional students and those with large online programs. The list also includes a number of universities that rank highly for student retention in the *U.S. News and World Report's* (*USNWR*) 2015 rankings for Best Online Bachelor's Programs.[66]

Figure 2.1: Benchmarked Institutions

| INSTITUTION	ONE-YEAR NEW STUDENT RETENTION RATE (2014)	SIX YEAR GRADUATION RATE	OVERALL ONLINE BACHELOR'S DEGREE RANK (USNWR)	TOTAL ENROLMENT
University of Illinois - Chicago	96%	N/A	2	171
Savannah College of Art and Design	84%	46.4%	11	606
University of Florida	90%	59.7%	13	1,122
Fort Hays State University	86%	73.0%	16	6,965
University of Wisconsin – Superior	92%	14.6%	23	684
University of Missouri – Kansas City	89%	N/A	34	N/A
Concordia University – St. Paul	79%	71.1%	40	897
University of Central Florida	87%	80.5%	50	8,425
Bellevue University	95%	N/A	63	7,341
Linfield College	87%	66.2%	63	766
Boise State University	86%	71.9%	72	709
Saint Leo University	73%	21.3% (5 year)	50	5,985
Liberty University	70%	39.8%	79	40,444
Columbia College	81%	19.6%	98	14,350
Bethel University	--	--	No Rank	--
Grand Canyon University	--	--	No Rank	--
Indiana Wesleyan University	--	--	No Rank	--
Olivet Nazarene University	--	--	No Rank	--

Source: *USNWR*[67]

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[66] *USNWR* defines one-year retention rates as the percentage of new entrants who re-enrolled sometime within one year after first enrolling.

[67] "Best Online Bachelor's Programs." 2015 Rankings. *U.S. News and World Report.*
http://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/bachelors/rankings?int=999208

BENCHMARKING EXPECTATIONS FOR FACULTY

Providing training for online instructors is a standard practice among benchmarked institutions, although the specifics of those training programs vary. For example, it is common, but not universal for institutions to offer institution financed training for online instructors. Of the 14 benchmark institutions with online bachelor's programs ranked by *USNWR,* 13 provide institution-financed faculty training. Linfield College, however, does not provide funds for online faculty training.

Figure 2.2: Institution Financed Online Instructor Training among *USNWR*-ranked Benchmark Institutions
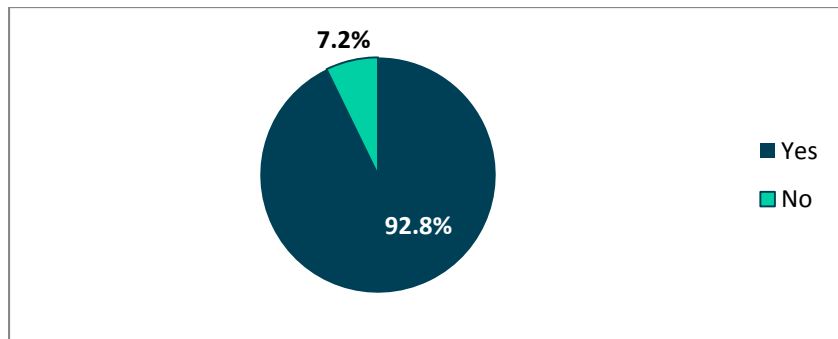
Source: *USNWR*[68]

Moreover, the length of this required training differs considerably between institutions. Several – including the Savannah College of Art and Design, the University of Florida, and Saint Leo University – maintain initial training periods of 10 hours or less. At the same time, institutions such as Central Florida University and Bellevue University require 40 or more hours.[69] While practices are less clear among un-ranked institutions, Grand Canyon University claims to offer "dedicated full-time faculty and fully-trained adjunct instructors," suggesting that it too provides instruction to new online faculty before putting them in a virtual classroom.[70]

Most online higher education providers also take steps to ensure that instructors of online courses are available to students. For example, the institutions analyzed in this report generally expect online instructors to respond to student questions within a timely manner. As is shown in Figure 2.3, the typical expected response period is no more than 24 to 48 hours. Moreover, many institutions have policies in place that govern the number of office hours that online faculty members are expected to offer. Figure 2.4 shows the office hour expectations of the 10 benchmark institutions that reported this data to *U.S. News.* It shows that approximately two-thirds of these institutions expect a commitment of one to six hours for this purpose. In addition, Grand Canyon University, which is not ranked by *USNWR* and is thus not included in Figure 2.4, expects full-time online faculty members to be available for

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "Online Degree Programs." Grand Canyon University. http://www.gcu.edu/Academics/Online-Degree-Programs.php

five hours each week "outside of normal work hours to answer urgent questions, take phone calls, and attend meetings."[71]

Figure 2.3: Expected Faculty Response Times

HOURS	INSTITUTIONS
24	Concordia University – St. Paul Grand Canyon University Linfield College Olivet Nazarene University Saint Leo University Savannah College of Art and Design University of Florida
30	University of Illinois-Chicago
48	Bellevue University Columbia College Fort Hays State University Liberty University University of Central Florida University of Missouri-Kansas City

Source: *USNWR,* Institutional Websites

Figure 2.4: Weekly Office Hours Available Remotely
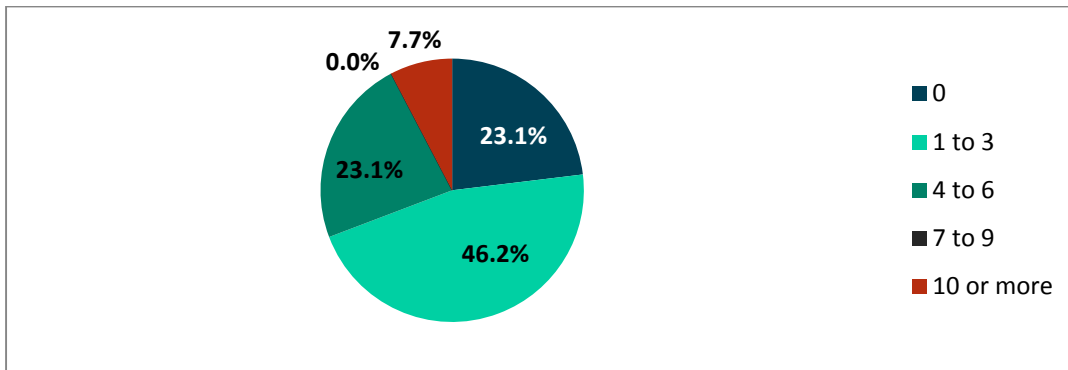
Source: *USNWR*
Note: Percentages based on 13 institutions with available information

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[71] "Grand Canyon University Faculty Handbook, 2012-2013." Grand Canyon University. p. 30.
http://gcumedia.com/lms-resources/faculty-resource-center/classroomResources/docs/faculty-handbook.pdf

CREATING A COMMUNITY

While faculty presence is one means of instilling in students a sense of belonging, other forms of connection are also valuable. Every institution reviewed for this report appears to offer some form of personal academic advising for online students. This is a useful retention practice for many reasons, including ensuring that students do not enroll in courses that are beyond their level and demonstrating clear pathways to graduation. However, the websites of many institutions also show that academic advisors – or, sometimes, mentors – also help retain students simply through serving as a solid connection to the campus and providing a sense that someone at the institution cares about their success.

The dual role of the advisor is perhaps most clearly elaborated at Indiana Wesleyan University. There, academic advisors help students with scheduling, answer questions about online learning or coursework, and "give advice on how [students] can best achieve [their] educational goals."[72] However, the advisors also serve in a personal support role. As stated by academic advisor Allison Toren in a promotional video, "one of the things I really appreciate about my job at Indiana Wesleyan is being able to pray with our students. They are going through so much… and we get to come alongside them and we get to pray with them, either by email or by phone."[73]

Community is also built peer-to-peer through connections between students. As discussed in Section I, a cohort program can be a useful tool for building comradery between students, but it can also be difficult to scale across an institution's entire online learning program. A simpler alternative is to maintain small class sizes, which gives students the opportunity to get to know one another better and to recognize classmates who they meet in multiple courses. Most of the benchmark institutions examined in this report manage class sizes well; of the 14 institutions for which Hanover was able to find an average undergraduate class size, 10 reported average classes of 20 or fewer students while another two reported average class sizes of 21.[74] In addition, Indiana Wesleyan University's specific average class size is publicly unavailable, but the institution advertises on its website that "class sizes are capped to create an intimate learning experience."[75]

It is also common for online higher education providers to reinforce student bonds by providing them with opportunities for synchronous interaction. Among the 14 benchmarked institutions that are ranked on the *U.S. News* Best Online Bachelor's Programs list, online chatrooms are a universal feature.[76]

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[72] "Experience IWU Online." Indiana Wesleyan University. https://www.indwes.edu/admissions/online/online-delivery
[73] Allison Toren promotional video. Ibid.
[74] "Best Online Bachelor's Programs," Op. cit.
[75] "Experience IWU Online," Op. cit.
[76] "Best Online Bachelor's Programs," Op. cit.

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

Experts also advise online education institutions to provide orientation sessions to new students. Orientations can be useful opportunities to introduce students to the institution and to start building their connections with it. They also serve a functional purpose by introducing students to online learning and the resources that are available to them, which may prevent frustration later.

New student orientations are standard practice across benchmarked institutions. Of the 14 *USNWR* ranked institutions included in this review, all but one (the University of Missouri-Kansas City) reports offering a new student orientation.[77] However, the exact nature of the orientation programs in place at these institutions can vary. One of the most common forms of online learning orientation is a short program offered through the online learning portal itself. This is the model in place at Columbia College, where students are asked to complete the following five modules prior to beginning classes:

- **Get Started –** View this module first and learn what to do before you register for classes.
- **Register for Classes –** See how to register and pay for classes
- **Your Online Classroom –** Learn about Desire2Learn (D2L), our learning management system.
- **Success as an Online Student –** Assess your readiness for online learning and view helpful tips for succeeding in an online course.
- **Resources –** Access other helpful Columbia College Resources

STUDENT SUPPORT

Figure 2.5 benchmarks the availability of 10 different student support services among online higher education providers, as reported by *USNWR.*

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[77] However, UMKC reports that some students may have to report in-person for "orientations," which suggests that at least some programs provide orientations to new students even if the university itself does not. Ibid.

Figure 2.5: Benchmark of Online Student Services

Institution	Academic Advising	Bookstore	Career Placement Assistance	Financial Aid Office/ Services	Access to Digitalized Library Materials	Access to Live Librarian	Mentoring	Technical Support	Live Tutoring	Writing Workshops
University of Illinois-Chicago	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Savannah College of Art and Design	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Florida	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fort Hays State University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Wisconsin – Superior	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Missouri – Kansas City	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Concordia University – St. Paul	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Central Florida	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bellevue University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Linfield College	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Boise State University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saint Leo University	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liberty University	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Columbia College	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Source: *USNWR*[78]

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[78] "Best Online Bachelor's Programs," Op. cit.

While the practices of individual institutions differ, this table suggests that many support services are standard across online providers. For example, all institutions shown above offer academic advising services, financial aid support and services, and access to a live librarian. Mentoring and writing workshops, though not as pervasive as other student support services, are still offered by the majority of benchmarked institutions. Given the positive effects mentoring has been shown to have on online student retention, this is a support service that online learning providers would be wise to adopt.

Moreover, all institutions shown above smooth the process of acquiring textbooks by providing online students with bookstore access. Benchmark institutions allow students to purchase textbooks and course supplies by term and course number rather than title.[79] This ensures that students have the correct edition of the textbook and will be less likely to have to return unneeded or mistakenly purchased materials.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

While best practices suggest that 24/7 live technical support is a valuable service that aids student retention, few of the institutions reviewed for this report appear to offer it. The University of Florida[80] and Saint Leo University[81] offer technology support by telephone 24 hours a day, but all other institutions appear to offer more limited hours.[82] Instead, most benchmark institutions provide technical support to online students through the established channels for assisting campus-based students. As such, these services tend to be available primarily during the day and early evening.

For example, Bethel University's Information Technology Services help desk is available approximately 90 hours per week during the academic year, with very limited hours on the weekend. Students who need support outside of those hours can search for a solution using tools and tutorials provided by the University, which are available 24/7, or by submitting a ticket for response by an on-call technology assistant.[83] Olivet Nazarene University utilizes a similar ticketing system to provide computer assistance during hours when its technology Help Desk is closed, which includes Saturdays and Sundays.[84]

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[79] For example, see "Ordering." Saint Leo University.
http://bookstore.mbsdirect.net/vb_buy2.php?CSID=AAT2TZMZUWJUAMACUKUOAOSCB&ACTION=top
[80] "Computing Help Desk." University of Florida. http://helpdesk.ufl.edu/
[81] "The Center for Online Learning." Saint Leo University.
http://saintleo.catalog.acalog.com/content.php?catoid=3&navoid=142
[82] The *U.S. News and World Report* reports that the Savannah College of Art and Design also provides 24/7 live tech support. However, Hanover was unable to verify this fact on the College's website.
[83] "Orientation to Online Learning at Bethel University." Bethel University.
https://confluence.bethel.edu/display/TLT/Orientation+to+Online+Learning+at+Bethel+University
[84] "About the Help Desk." Olivet Nazarene University.

ONLINE STUDENT TUTORING MODELS

Figure 2.6 summarizes the primary tutoring options available to online students at the institutions reviewed for this report. Several institutions, such as Bellevue University, continue to rely on their own resources, providing tutoring to online students over the phone or by Skype through established tutoring centers. However, a majority of institutions have shifted online student tutoring to third-party providers. Among the institutions reviewed for this report, the most popular of these tutoring contractors appears to be SmarThinking, a service developed by Pearson.[85] By contracting with a third-party provider to offer free tutoring to online students, these universities are able to offer 24/7 live tutoring support for some subjects.

Figure 2.6: Online Tutoring Models Used by Benchmarked Institutions

INSTITUTION	DESCRIPTION OF TUTORING MODEL	WEBSITE
University of Illinois - Chicago	Academic Center for Excellence provides math and science tutoring as well as one-on-one mentoring from academic coaches; This service is not specific to online students.	http://www.uic.edu/depts/ace/acad_mentoring.shtml
Savannah College of Art and Design	Peer tutors (upper-level, high-achieving students) available for one-on-one appointments for online students	http://www.scad.edu/academics/elearning/student-experience/student-services
University of Florida	UF Online offers transition advising, major advising, and group advising for online students as well as a number of videos designed to improve students' study skills. UF Teaching Center tutors have also created over 1,500 videos designed to assist students in specific courses that include video solutions for previous semesters' exams, exam reviews, course-specific concept videos and general study skills.	https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/tutoring/video-resources/ http://ufonline.ufl.edu/resources/academic-support/#advising
Fort Hays State University	Free online tutoring (live tutoring, online writing lab, question submissions) provided through SmarThinking	http://www.fhsu.edu/virtualcollege/student/smarthinking/ http://www.smarthinking.com/about-us/
University of Wisconsin – Superior	24/7 tutoring available through Tutor.com; Writing Center provides extended hours to help accommodate distance learners	https://www.uwsuper.edu/dl/current/academic-support.cfm
University of Missouri – Kansas City	24/7 subject-specific tutoring available through NetTutor	http://online.umkc.edu/learn-online/online-tutoring/
Concordia University – St. Paul	Live tutoring certain subjects, video library, writing lab, and email support through Brainfuse	http://www.brainfuse.com/highEd/liveTutoring.asp
University of Central Florida	Peer Assisted Learning (group learning led by a peer tutor) sessions available on a schedule via Adobe Connect; Sessions are not exclusive to online learners	http://sarc.sdes.ucf.edu/opal

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[85] "SmartThinking: the Leader in On-Demand Student Support." Pearson. http://www.smarthinking.com/

INSTITUTION	DESCRIPTION OF TUTORING MODEL	WEBSITE
Bellevue University	Subject-specific tutoring available by appointment through phone and Skype; Questions also answered via email	http://www.bellevue.edu/student-support/tutoring-services/tutoring-and-study-skills
Linfield College	Subject specific tutoring in 13 subjects provided by Western eTutoring Consortium, includes live chat and asynchronous question answering	https://www.etutoring.org/login.cfm?institutionid=248&returnPage=
Boise State University	Subject specific tutoring provided by Western eTutoring Consortium, includes live chat and asynchronous question answering	https://ecampus.boisestate.edu/students/support/etutoring/
Saint Leo University	Subject-specific tutoring available by appointment; Tutoring support also available through SmarThinking	http://www.saintleo.edu/resources/learning-resource-center/tutortrac.aspx http://www.saintleo.edu/resources/learning-resource-center/smarthinking.aspx
Liberty University	One-on-one, subject-specific tutoring available 24/7 through Tutor.com; Online Writing Center provides live and asynchronous assistance	http://www.liberty.edu/online/free-online-tutoring/ http://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=17176
Columbia College	Tutoring not provided for online courses; Writing Center staff are available to support local online students enrolled in certain courses through face-to-face instruction	https://web.ccis.edu/Offices/AcademicResources/Tutoring.aspx http://web.ccis.edu/Offices/AcademicResources/WritingCenter.aspx
Bethel University	Tutoring in 14 subjects and a writing lab provided through SmarThinking; tutoring in some subjects is available 24/7	https://www.betheluniversityonline.net/mbacollege2/smarthinking.htm
Grand Canyon University	Live, subject-specific tutoring is available 10-4 AM EST through ThinkingStorm, up to 10 hours per year is free; Online students can also book a tutor through the GCU Learning Lounge	http://www.gcu.edu/Learning-Resources/Lounge/ThinkingStorm.php
Indiana Wesleyan University	N/A	--
Olivet Nazarene University	Tutoring in eight subjects and a writing lab provided by SmarThinking.	http://graduate.olivet.edu/students

Source: Institutional Websites

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