**ORGANIC RETENTION:**

Student Success Collaboration in “Write Spaces”

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**Session 67**

Friday, March 15: 11 a.m. – 12 noon

Baldwin Room

Student Retention Conference

***Completing College: What it takes, What’s at stake***

Auburn Hills, MI

March 14 & 15, 2013

**Workshop Agenda**

Part 1: Participant Survey

Guiding Question: **What does Your campus need to do to enhance retention?**

Part 2: Workshop Goal

Guiding Question: **What is the retention/writing center connection?**

Part 3: Definition and Touchstones: Organic Retention

Guiding Question: **What do we mean by Organic Retention?**

Part 4: Tinto’s Framework for Student Success and its Relationship to Writing Center Work

Guiding Question: **How are Tinto’s four (4) retention factors (as discussed in yesterday’s keynote and his publications) relevant to writing center work?**

Part 5: Specific Writing Center Retention Efforts

Guiding Question: **What initiatives showcase writing centers’ retention roles?**

Part 6: Writing Center Research on Retention

Guiding Question: **What does existing research say about the writing center’s role in retention?**

Part 7:Concluding Survey:

Guiding Question: **Now that you have heard about various writing center retention innovations and their alignment with Tinto’s Student Success Factors, how can you envision partnering with or leveraging your institution’s writing center? If you do not have one, list reasons why you might want to found one to redress attrition.**

Part 8: References

1. **Participant Survey**

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| What group(s) of students on your campus most present retention risks? |
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| What resources might your institution supply or enhance to retain more students and to ensure that students develop key abilities (critical thinking, writing, quantitative reasoning, etc.)? |
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| Does your institution host a writing center? What roles (if any) do you think writing centers play in retention? |
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1. **Workshop Goal**

Writing centers are always already involved in retention. In this session, therefore, we seek to raise awareness about roles writing centers historically have played, currently play, and potentially might play in retention. Although writing centers are generally placed in Academic Affairs, whereas retention efforts are traditionally spearheaded in Student Affairs, we maintain that the organizational chart should not disenfranchise an important student success resource. If higher education stakeholders like you hope to decrease attrition on your campuses, we suggest that you invite writing center personnel into this important conversation about student success.

1. **Definition and Touchstones: Organic Retention**

For us, “Organic Retention” refers to local campus strategies that, while employing theory and research from the literature on retention and higher education, respond to the needs of students as contextualized in a specific institution.

Our definition owes much to the work of Bob Broad , et al. (2009), author of *Dynamic Criteria Mapping in Action: Organic Writing Assessment*; Richard Haswell (2001), author of *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction within a University Writing Program*; and Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1989), authors of *Fourth Generation Evaluation*.

Together these scholars suggest the following touchstones regarding assessment of higher education (and other programs):

* “Good assessment is always local” (Haswell, 2001, xiv).
* Good local assessment attuned to the needs of students, faculty, and staff in a particular context can:
* Enhance student learning, teaching, and assessment
* Invigorate faculty participants
* Facilitate faculty “buy in” (Broad, 2009, 5)

**4. Tinto’s Framework for Student Success and its Relationship to Writing Center Work**

Tinto’s (2012) framework for how institutions can think about student success (i.e., retention and learning) includes four components:

* Expectations
* Support
* Assessment and Feedback
* Involvement

**Tinto on Expectations:**

“Student retention and graduation is shaped by the availability of clear and consistent expectations about what is required to be successful in college” (10).

“A good many students begin higher education without knowing what to expect” (11).

**Tinto on Support:**

“Too much challenge and/or too little concurrent support could prompt maladaptive coping strategies such as ignoring the challenge or escaping it by leaving college” (as cited by Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002, pp. 24-25).

“Nothing is more important to student retention than academic support, especially during the critical first year of college, when student retention is still very responsive to institutional intervention” (25).

“Not just the underprepared require academic support” (26).

“Feelings of competence encourage individuals to engage in complex tasks and influence the amount of effort they will expend on those tasks and how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles” (27).

“. . . student support programming is increasingly being seen as part and parcel of college education, involving intellectual, social, and emotional development” (50).

**Tinto on Assessment and Feedback:**

“An environment rich in assessment of students’ performance and in feedback of information about student performance to students, faculty, and staff is another important condition for student success” (54).

“Students are more likely to succeed in settings that enable all parties—students, faculty, and staff—to adjust their behaviors to better promote student success” (54).

“Feedback is particularly helpful when it creates a slight cognitive dissonance between what a person thinks of his or her performance and what a person discovers from feedback, because such dissonance can cause profound changes in behavior (Carroll, 1998)” (54).

. . . they (institutional assessments) recognize that all students may struggle at one time or another, not just those who are thought to be at risk . . . [and] raises the question of how classrooms and other places of learning can be changed to increase the likelihood that students will succeed in class and, in turn, complete college” (63).

**Tinto on Involvement (now referred to as Engagement):**

“The fourth condition for student retention, perhaps the most important, is involvement, or what is now commonly referred [to] as engagement (Astin 1984; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 1991; Tinto, 1975. The more students are academically and socially engaged with other people on campus, especially with faculty and student peers, the more likely (other things being equal) they will stay and graduate from college (Astin,1984, 1993; Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993)” (64).

“Among all the students, regardless of ethnicity and race, those having a larger number of formal academic connections with faculty, as well as a larger number of formal and informal social connections with faculty, staff, and peers, were found to enjoy greater satisfaction and higher retention. *Conversely, the absence of such ties proved to be a predictor of leaving” (emphasis ours, 64)*

“. . . the impact of engagement on student performance in any institution reflects in part the institutional setting in which involvement occurs, not the least of which is the cultural context that gives meaning to student interactions with people on campus” (66).

“. . . pedagogies of engagement require students to be actively engaged in learning with other students in the classroom (Barkley 2010; Barkley, Cross, and Major 2005). The most commonly employed of these pedagogies are cooperative or collaborative learning, and problem- or project-based learning. Both have been shown to positively impact student success because they lead not only to greater academic engagement but also to social relationships with other students (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

Cooperative or collaborative learning, though somewhat different as the former is more structured that the latter (see Bruffee 1995) requires students to become actively involved in learning groups with other students . . . “(68-69).

“They do so because it is becoming increasingly clear that effective faculty development requires on-going collaborative engagement and inquiry that is typically not achieved through stand alone activities to which different faculty attend” (78).

1. **Specific Writing Center Retention Efforts at Oakland University**

While just about everything that a writing center does addresses retention, the list below spotlights some of OU writing center programs specifically designed to retain students.

* **Cite Right.** Plagiarism education seminar for those found guilty of academic misconduct. If students agree to complete the program and acknowledge the mistake or intentional breach, most are allowed to concurrently complete the program and register for classes. This seven-session independent tutorial is an invitation to a dialogue about plagiarism as an issue that involves skills, cultural awareness, and ethical considerations. Instead of “fixing” the challenged paper/assignment, students read texts about plagiarism, identify what happened in their own work, engage in guided practice of summary and paraphrase, and reflect upon their skills and attitudes. This program culminates in a synthesis paper about plagiarism, wherein the student author is asked to demonstrate his perspective on this dialogue and to showcase emergent skills in using others’ words and ideas in support of the student author’s own argument and with his/her own words.
* **Ready, Set, Right: 3-session primer for conditionally admitted students and for students identified as “at-risk,” who are funneled into COM 101, a college readiness course.**
  + Defines rhetoric via acronyms like SOAPSTone and SPERM, offering specific questions to ask both when students read and when they write about what they read.
  + Introduces Dual-Entry Note-Taking as a form of pre-writing for an assignment.
  + Demonstrates how to read and annotate an assignment
  + Explores different non-fiction assignment genres
  + Modeling strategies for getting started
  + Examines other resources available for writers, such as Online Writing Labs.
  + Employs tactile exercises for identifying source types, paraphrasing, and creating citations
* **Embedded Writing Specialist Program:** Developmental writing intervention, which places a writing consultant in the basic writing class once a week, which is designed to facilitate a relationship with well-performing peers and campus support services. At some campuses, the writing center serves a role in an accelerated learning program, which allows basic writers to begin in college composition, rather than pre-college classes, but the writing center hosts a one-credit supplemental instruction session.
* **Specialized tutoring for high attrition classes** like ENG 215: Fundamentals of Grammar
* **Dissertation 101: A program aimed at the most under-supported writers—graduate students—who face writing tasks that differ significantly from UG.** This is particularly true at the dissertation stage because writing in other genres does not prepare one to compose a dissertation and those entrusted to supervise have little preparation for guiding others through the process than having written their own.
  + Great success in reducing the time between passing comprehensives and defending the proposal.
* **Syllabus and Assignment Consulting for Faculty in Writing Intensive Courses**
* **Writing support for faculty publications**
* **Training academic peer mentors who operate within the residence halls**
* **Serving on the Conditional Admissions Committee**, which shapes policy regarding the support services for and expectations of underprepared students who seek to gain full admittance to the U
* Conducting research and collaborating with our Office of Institutional Research to compare our user stats with those of basic writers, which is a first step in demonstrating how, if at all, our services might be mediating attrition.
  + Conducted a Qualtrics survey of basic writing students, faculty, and embedded writing specialist about the perceived influence of the EWS Program and the writing center on student persistence within the course.

1. **Writing Center Research on Retention**

**Research that defines that writing center’s role in retention:** Before he demonstrates how writing centers historically have demonstrated the very factors that Tinto and others have sought, Griswold (2003) explains in “Writing centers: The student retention connection,” (2003) why writing centers aren’t generally recognized as parties to retention efforts: the Academic Affairs/Student Affairs split (“running on parallel but separate tracks,” Terenzini and Pascarella, 1997, p. 178). Griswold maintains that student success hinges on the following:

* Campus environment that allows students to seek significant learning outside the classroom (Kuh and Shuh, 1991, p. v) and one that chunks services and programs (Tinto, 1993, p. 199).
* Meaningful access to and interaction with faculty and other campus representatives, such as writing center consultants and librarians.
* Focus on academic initiatives not just social retention
* Mode of instruction that requires active participation.
* Peer Tutoring programs in conjunction with other academic support services
  + Writing centers provide access to interested and supportive campus representatives who are in many cases peers. They focus on helping the writer to help him/herself.

**Research that demonstrates initial findings in support of the writing center’s efficacy in mediating attrition:** In “Critical inquiry and writing centers: A methodology of assessment” (2012), Bell and Frost compare data from their institution’s Office of Institutional Research with basic writers’ writing center attendance rates. While participation was deemed mandatory to the course, students had to make their own appointments. The researchers coded basic writers’ attendance rates as follows: full participants, frequent participants, partial participants, and non-participants. They found that full and frequent participants had a much higher rate of college persistence than did their partial and marginal counterparts. Full and frequent participants graduated within five (5) years at a rate of 25%, whereas the rest of the cohort graduated at a rate of 20%.

**Research that addresses methodological complexity in documenting persistence:** And while writing centers are increasing researching or at least attempting to assess their role in retention, we must be mindful that retention is influenced by many factors, many outside the writing center’s purview, factors which can potentially obscure our mediation. For example, in “An examination of persistence research through the lens of a comprehensive conceptual framework,” Reason (2009)notes that while a “substantial empirical prescriptive literature does exist to guide faculty members, campus administrators, and public policy makers in attempts to increase student persistence,” most of these studies “fail to consider the wide variety of influences that shape student persistence, focusing instead on discrete conditions, interventions, and reforms” (Terenzini & Reason, 2005)” (659). Reason employs a framework he created with Terenzini to examine college student persistence, which he distinguishes from retention as an individual versus and institutional phenomenon (660). In other words, persistence is defined as “student goal attainment rather than the institutional goal of keeping students” (660). Because the influences on student persistence are plural but the existing models were in his words “overly narrow,” they synthesized existing models into the Terenzini and Reason framework, which theorizes that student success is affected by “student precollege characteristics and experiences, organizational context, the student peer environment, and, finally, the individual student experience” (662). Organizational factors also influence the student’s persistence. Most notably what type of institution the student initially attends and its quality appear to be more correlated with student ability to thrive.

**6. Concluding Survey**

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| Now that you have heard about various writing center retention innovations and their alignment with Tinto’s Student Success Factors, how can you envision partnering with or leveraging your institution’s writing center? If you do not have one, list reasons why you might want to found one to redress attrition. |
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1. **References**

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