Since 1988, South Carolina's Piedmont Technical College (PTC) has been engaged in a process to develop a functional model for calculating student retention. The college has defined retention as a series of levels at which students and the college persist and work to fulfill goals. This definition is based on the ideas that there is no single number to measure an institution's effectiveness; retention is a joint effort between the student and the institutions; and the term "persist" refers to the process of retention, while the term "success" refers to the product. To develop a system for determining retention, PTC applied Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" to the retention process. As a first step in the new system, PTC classified students in the following categories: continuing students, reinstated students, transfer students, and first timers (i.e., those whose initial college experience is at PTC). After a trial run, the model was altered to account for graduates and treated developmental education as an academic program. The model now allows the college to determine both program and overall college retention rates for each of the four categories of students, as well as by student race, sex, age, and grade point average. Future plans for the system include incorporating retention as a major goal in the institutional plan and merging retention goals with student goals. Bibliographic citations of articles in the ERIC database related to retention and sample retention data are appended. (TGI)
Portrait of a Working Model for Calculating Student Retention

Friday, November 3, 1995

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Greenwood, SC

Paper presented at the Annual Assessment Conference of the South Carolina Higher Education Association

(8th, Myrtle Beach, SC, November 15-17, 1995)
Introduction:

Much has been written and developed over the last several decades which focuses upon the subject and/or process of retention. (See attached bibliography). The purpose of this workshop is to present an operational view of what retention is and what retention is not and possibly what it may never be. The information presented today will present an overview, an update for some of you, regarding a computerized system for the calculation of retention rates.

Since the conception of this program in 1988, our view of what the retention beast is has changed. It is quite safe to assume, that by the nature of our process for determining retention rates, we have also defined retention for the college. Whether this is an operational definition or a functional definition is left up to the individual. In my opinion, once we have operationally defined something, it then becomes a functional property. As a functional property, it becomes something you can truly see; something that has shape, scope, and form. It is with this premise in mind, that the following functional definition of retention is offered.

"Retention: a series of levels at which students and the college persist and work to fulfill goals."

In looking at this functional view of retention, several historical views of retention have been moved aside.

(1) There is no single number to measure an institution's retention.

(2) Retention is a joint effort between the student and the institution. Institutional goals must be student centered or retention will be severed. (The Lemming Exodus Syndrome.)
(3) Often times, the word success is used to define retention. The word persist describes the functional aspect of retention (process) while success may be viewed as the functional end (product). Individual student success would be a difficult beast to capture in that each individual’s functional definition of success is entirely different and would be tied to an individual’s purpose (goals).

The previous view of our model has been presented during various stages of development and use. In those presentations, analogies were made regarding “wading through the alligator pit.” Through the evolution of this program, another analogy for the retention process is offered.

“During the past five years, my daughter has collected box turtles that were injured or disabled, lost on a highway, or those that appeared mysteriously at our doorstep. She placed them on our patio, fed them, nurtured them, and cared for them. Her retention rate has been one hundred percent for five years. The six foot tall privacy brick wall had a lot to do with her success and a lot to do with the diminished persistence of her turtles. The orchestra of life played on. All was right with our world.

Over the summer, our family, and of course the turtles, moved to a new home. This new home had no six foot tall brick privacy fence. After a brief meeting of all participants, a committee of one was organized to insure our retention success would continue. A new environment was constructed of stone walls (approximately fourteen inches tall), small stone winter residences were built for the guests, and food service capability was insured. The committee assessed need and predetermined what was required to insure success. The orchestra was beginning to tune their instruments.

We placed our slow moving guests in their new environment and proceeded with other endeavors. The next morning we took roll. There were no turtles. Our success was no longer positive and the orchestra was packing their bags. The committee was reactivated. The committee captured as many of the attritional turtles as possible (it was easier and cheaper to get these escapees than find or solicit new ones). The committee then built the wall higher and placed a small pool within the confines and secured a small tightly woven fence on the inside of the penal rock colony. It was at this point that the committee began to re-evaluate the current situation. Observing the residents of this environment, one could begin to see thought processes or instincts to function. As persistence rates soared, each and every re-captured turtle plodded, climbed, and rolled their way to freedom. Their individual drive went beyond the preconceived ideas of need by the committee. The committee and all participants then re-evaluated their purpose and mission. Once their mission became truly functional so did and will their retention. The mission was changed to care for the injured or harmed and then release. The orchestra was beginning to move back on the stage."
The premise behind this analogy is that the institution can erect environments which they feel meet needs. But for students, these safe environments may become barriers that are either hurdled or block the direction the student is moving. For some students, it becomes easier to leave than to continually persist.

System Evolution

The system at Piedmont was designed to provide in-depth program and college summary information to all academic and support personnel in regards to "who we may be losing."

Prior to 1988, the college routinely calculated college retention/attrition rates. The formula was very simple: "number of students actually returning for an academic term" divided by "the number of students eligible to return" = "the college retention rate (%)." During 1988, questions began to evolve regarding the accuracy of this process. But more important were the questions regarding "what were we counting" and "why were we counting." The magic single number concept was coming under fire.

The four phases of systems outlined by Karl Albrecht became the guideline during 1988-1989. This four phase process outlined a plan for developing an improved system.

The two important questions of "what were we counting" and "why were we counting" can not be lost in this discussion. These two questions laid the foundation in the assessment phase by identifying disparities between "how things are" and "how should they be." The Cutting Edge legislation was coming and mandatory reporting was not far off. The college wished to develop and utilize a system which would be constructive and beneficial in nature rather than one that could be perceived as ambiguous, punitive or used for system wide comparisons.
Since 1988, the watchword continues to be "continuous improvement." With Albrecht’s model for systems development in place, it was found that quarterly principles could be found within and supporting the development and implementation of the retention system. Unknowingly at first, but now quite visible, were the incorporation of Stephen R. Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. What we have done is to depersonalize the seven habits and apply each to the retention system. Listed below are each of the seven habits as they apply to each of us and how they were adjusted to support the retention system.
Habit 1: Be Proactive
Personal
The habit of being proactive, or the habit of personal vision, means taking responsibility for our attitudes and actions. Take the initiative and responsibility to make things happen.
Retention System
The habit of being proactive, or the habit of vision, means taking the responsibility for our values and beliefs. Take the initiative and responsibility to make things happen.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind
Personal
Habit of personal leadership. Start with a clear destination to understand where you are now, where you are going, and what you value most.
Retention System
Habit of leadership. Start with a clear destination to understand where you are now, where you are going, and what you value most.

Habit 3: Put First Things First
Personal
Habit of personal management, involves organizing and managing time and events. Manage yourself. Organize and execute around priorities.
Retention System
Habit of management, involves organizing and managing needs and goals. Organize and execute around priorities.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win
Personal
Win-win is the habit of personal leadership. Win-win is the habit of seeking mutual benefit. This thinking begins with a commitment to explore all options until a mutual satisfactory solution is reached, or to make no deal at all.
Retention System
Win-win is the habit of leadership seeks mutual benefit. This thinking begins with a commitment to explore all options until a mutual solution is reached, or to make no deal at all.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood
Personal
Habit of empathetic communication. Understanding builds the skills of empathetic listening that inspires openness and trust.
Retention System
Remains the same.

Habit 6: Synergize
Personal
Habit of creative cooperation and teamwork. Synergy results from valuing differences by bringing different perspectives together in the spirit of mutual respect.
Retention System
Remains the same.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw
Personal
Habit of self-renewal. Preserving and enhancing your greatest asset, yourself, by renewing the physical, spiritual, mental, and social dimensions of your nature.
Retention System
Habit of renewal. The system is never complete or accomplished, just constantly improved upon.
In reviewing the habits above, it is obvious that individual decision makers and users must incorporate the personal habits into their own lives prior to having complete understanding and appreciation for the result. Each of us practice these endeavors on a daily basis but terminology may be different. It is rather difficult to program "common sense" into a machine. The overall result for the system is to have a process by which the results are non-punitive, constructive, constantly self-improving, and honest.

The System

The college assumed the stance that a single retention rate was not truly indicative of the various subgroups contained within our student population. As an example, prior to 1988, a student completing a spring term and not enrolling in the summer term but returning in the fall term, was classified as a new student. It was for this reason the following subgroups of students were operationally defined in the problem solving stage.

**Continuing Student:** Student who was enrolled in the college during academic term; is eligible to return to the college and does so during the next sequential academic term.

**Reinstated Student:** A student who had been enrolled at the college previously and remained away from the college for one or more academic terms, prior to registering for classes.

**Transfer Students:** A student new to the college but who has been enrolled at another two year or four year college.

**First Timers:** A student whose initial college experience begins here.

These four student categories then became the nucleus for "students eligible to return" and "students actually returning." Also branched from each of these categories were student fields of race, sex, and age. New for 1995 was GPR ranges. From this data
alone, the report, as an example, could tell the number of minority males under age 20 who re-enrolled for a specific program and what their GPR was.

It became apparent, on the trial run of the above data, something was amiss. The numbers didn't match and didn't really make any sense. (What are we counting?) Graduates were the missing link and it was found the older system had a unique process for counting graduates. If they did not re-enroll, it was "attrition." In essence, a program was punished for producing graduates. The computer lacked moral logic and we couldn't provide the need, but we could loop around the process. Graduates were counted by subtracting them from the base of students who "were eligible to return." We were now approaching clean data.

After various redesigns, it was concluded that for the purpose of our internal reporting, Developmental Education would be treated as an academic program. In essence, calculations applied to any curricular program would now be applied to Developmental Education by student program codes.

As with any system, supportive and back up measures are provided within the model. The first initial draft of the system was met by skepticism among various curriculum areas. Namely, the question arose as to, "How do we know these are the right numbers?" Since that question was asked, the program now has the capability to list students' names and social security numbers for every identified field within the program. With this addition to the program, faculty members now have lists of students who were enrolled but did not re-enroll. These have proven invaluable for the academic departments in talking with students to encourage either late enrollment or enrollment in a future term.
Program VS. College Retention

Operationally, the college views two retention rates with numerous retention subsets under each of continuing, transfer, reinstated and first timers. The calculation of program retention views students as leaving a program of study but remaining at the college as influencing college retention positively (positive in the sense that these students remain in the educational confines of the college.) Conversely, these same students do affect program retention in the negative sense in that they are no longer within their primary program choice. This begins to answer the question as to what and why we count.

It is important for the college to view the aggregate students and their movement through the labyrinth of the educational system. Students moving, hopefully due to goals, from one program to another do affect program and college retention. As an example, if the college enrolls only ten students and 5 were enrolled in Academic Program One and 5 in Academic Program Two, and 3 students left Program One and transferred to Program Two, the result would be Program One had a retention rate of 40% (2 of 5 remaining), Program Two had a retention rate of 100% and the college retention rate would be 100%. The 3 students transferring into Program Two would be picked up as transfer students during the next academic term and monitoring would continue. Confusing? Sometimes, but it presents a realistic picture of the retention process in action. If Program One continued to show transfers into another program, academic assessment of the program as to "why" this occurs would begin. The assessment would have data that views these transfers as to race, age, sex, and previous history. The questions would focus upon, "are there patterns for this action?, Is the program a feeder to the other?, Has Program One maxed it's potential?", etc. It would be at this juncture that many of these questions could
be answered during an academic review process after additional supportive information is merged with the retention data.

What and Why Were We Counting?

Putting aside the legislative mandates from CHE and the national trends for accounting and assessment, the college moved toward the concept of continuous improvement. By building "retention" into the institutional plan as a major goal and by emphasizing retention as a college wide activity, increased ownership occurred. As retention becomes a tool for improving the nature of academic programs, the concepts of comparability and punitive actions take a back seat to improvement. Does this mean all faculty, staff and administration reach a euphoric state when reviewing term retention statistics? No, but the process does foster awareness, concern, and interest in a process which tended to be viewed as negative in the past.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The system is never complete, just being fine tuned. Student goals must be better defined. Determination of retention must eventually be merged with student goals, namely due to the students who never wish to acquire a degree but merely take self or job improvement courses. Their goals are different and must be treated as such. We still have not figured out how to program "common-sense" into the machine.

The entire "student package" of goals may be the most difficult, but perhaps the most realistic and needed portion of this system. As student needs and college programs change, so will the system. It can never stay the same as long as we, as a college, use the results for continual improvement and continually assess our progress as to "what and why are we counting."
In addition, placement scores will be an added field. This field will break out retention and attrition studies based upon programs of study. This will provide the baseline data for determining how “successful” students are based upon placement standards. Of more importance, the question could read “How accurate are our placement standards based upon the success of students.” We may be entering the alligator infested pools once again when this subgroup field is complete.
THE SYSTEM

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

STUDENT GROUPS: Continuing, Reinstated, First Time & Transfers

sex
gpr
status
age
race

Program & College Rates Based Upon # Eligible To Return & # Actually Returned. Names Are Available For All Fields. (No Graduates)

SIS Data Base
By focusing upon the "Product" of retention, namely a number, do we lose sight of the "Process" and develop or create barriers which hinder the Persistence and/or the Success of our students?
Do Our Peers Eagerly Await The Publication of The Retention Report?
Does The Institution's Purpose Coincide With The Student's Purpose or Are We Back To Creating Barriers?
Technical Notes on The Automated System

Piedmont Technical College
Greenwood, SC

Established on VAX 6310
Language: VAX BASIC Version 3.7
Lines Of Code: 2700
Estimated Development Time: 800 Hours+
Feature: Loops Through 6 SIS Files

For Technical Information Contact:
Stephanie Stevens
(803)-941-8354
Piedmont Technical College
OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS & PLANNING

Those Numbers Are Wrong!

They Came From The VAX

Holy Chihuahua

I Don’t Care They Are Still Wrong

Please be Right

The Boy Is Going To Have To Lay Off The Coffee

Here We Go Again
Institution: Alabama State Dept. of Postsecondary Education, Montgomery.
Title: The Chancellor's Biennial Report: Two Years of Progress, 1983-85.
Pub. Date: [85]
Descriptive Note: 21p. (1 microfiche)
** The library does not have this journal **

NO:38
ERIC Number: ED254267
Author(s): Suter, Marcia A.
Title: A Comparison of Grades, GPA, and Retention of Developmental Students at Northwest Technical College.
Pub. Date: 12 Aug 83
Descriptive Note: 24p.; Graduate seminar paper, University of Toledo. (1 microfiche)
** The library does not have this journal **

NO:39
ERIC Number: ED251815
Institution: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, Urbana, Ill.
Title: Reading and Study Skills and Instruction--College and Adult: Abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations Published in "Dissertation Abstracts International," July through December 1984 (Vol. 45 Nos. 1 through 6).
Pub. Date: 84
Descriptive Note: 10p.; Pages may be marginally legible. (1 microfiche)
** The library does not have this journal **

NO:40
ERIC Number: ED224374
Author(s): Keim, H. David, II; Stevenson, Alice F.
Title: Model for Determination of Student Attrition: Causes and Trends. B.E.N. Student Retention.
Pub. Date: 13 Nov 80
Descriptive Note: 46p.; This paper was identified by a joint project of the Institute on Desegregation at North Carolina Central University and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University. The paper was also presented at the Annual Meeting of the North Carolina Association for Institutional Research (November 13, 1980). (1 microfiche)
** The library does not have this journal **

NO:41
ERIC Number: ED221241
Author(s): Juergens-Ellsworth, Jan; And Others
Institution: Milwaukee Area Technical Coll., Wis.; Wisconsin State Board of Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education, Madison.
ABSTRACT - The purpose of a project was to develop a model for more effective recruitment and retention of people of color in the Associate Degree Interior Design and Diploma Interior Design Assistant Program at Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC), Wisconsin. During Activity One, individuals in MATC's Student Development and High School Relations Departments and Milwaukee Public Schools resource people were interviewed to determine strategies for recruiting high school students. During Activity Two, interior design professionals were interviewed to locate potential training sites and mentors for high school students. Findings were as follows: MATC made very little effort to recruit in any high school program area; most high school students were not aware of MATC as a continuing schooling option and did not understand what interior design was; no special recruitment efforts were needed to attract minority high school students; and MATC's interior design programs should be specifically presented to students in art-related courses in high schools. Several recommendations were made: use of minicourses or seminars, shadowing efforts involving current MATC interior design students with potential students, and presentation by MATC personnel of solutions to perceived barriers to potential students. A video of interior design careers, consisting of interviews with six interior designers and features on students, was produced. (Appendixes include questions used in video interviews and lists of resource people and organizations.) (YLB)
ABSTRACT - The Indiana Vocational Technical College (IVTC) is a state-supported two-year college with 22 campuses across Indiana. In January 1992, as part of a college-wide effort to improve institutional effectiveness, an eight-member Retention Committee (RC) was established, consisting of executive and instructional deans; directors of student services; directors of planning, research, and student relations; a registrar; and a staff person. The RC was designed to review current IVTC retention policies, collect baseline statistics on regional and institutional retention, and visit selected institutions with exemplary retention programs. After reviewing the literature on retention and tracking systems, the committee developed a two-step student cohort tracking system and solicited information on retention activities at individual IVTC campuses. In addition, RC members visited four two-year campuses in other states which had innovative retention programs. Following the site visits, a list of retention terms and activities was developed and sent to IVTC campus administrators for review and use in identifying and improving retention activities. Among the RC’s findings and recommendations were the following: (1) successful retention efforts must have top-level administrative support; (2) IVTC non-persistence rates appeared comparable to the national average; (3) early warning systems at IVTC are too often informal or uncoordinated; (4) many IVTC faculty and staff orientations do not include a special emphasis on retention; (5) retention committees should be established at each IVTC campus; (6) a fund for innovative retention programs should be created; and (7) a college-wide course/class/instructor evaluation system should be implemented. (PAA)
ABSTRACT - Ranken Technical College, a small, private, non-profit, two-year technical college in St. Louis, developed a plan whereby at-risk students would be flagged, their needs assessed, and programs put into place to meet those needs. The desired result was a higher retention rate, especially among minorities. The following components were found to be essential to the drop-out prevention program: (1) an extended orientation; (2) a freshman survival course; (3) identification of at-risk students; (4) assessment of at-risk students; (5) specific prescriptions for remediation of weaknesses; (6) collaboration among faculty, staff, and administration; (7) immediate, consistent, and on-going feedback among Learning Resource Center specialists, faculty, tutors and students, and, when necessary, administration and staff; (8) the ability to respond immediately to perceived trends; and (9) the flexibility to make ongoing changes in the program itself. The entire program works because the whole college is involved in the effort. A community of relationships and bonds for the students have been created for the students. (RS)
### Overall Summary

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#### Subgroup 1: Student Categories - College Retention (Only Takes into Account Attr - Those Who Left The College)

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#### Subgroup 1-A: Student Categories - Program Retention (Takes Into Account Attr & Int Trans - Those Who Left The College & The Major)

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<td>15</td>
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#### Subgroup 4: Internal Transfers

**The following is a list of the majors' students who left this program transferred into:***

- **ECT3**
- **ECT5**

#### Subgroup 5: Goals of First Time Students

- **Reasons for Attending**
  - **Skills for New Job**
  - **Skills to Adv In Job**
  - **Transfer to 4-Yr Coll**
  - **Satisfy GI Ed Require**
  - **Improve Basic Skills**
  - **Personal Interest**
  - **Other**
  - **Plans to Earn Cert/Diplomas At PTC**
  - **2-Yr Degree**
  - **Certificate/Diploma**
  - **Undecided**
  - **No**

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**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**
### Subgroup 6: Developmental Education Status

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<th>Name</th>
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<th>CATEGORY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Claude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeffrey D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roger L</td>
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| PDev | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SSp | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1st Trans | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cont | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

### Subgroup 7: Program Retention by SPR and Student Category

**First Time Transfer Continuing Reinstates**

<table>
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<th>GPR</th>
<th>0.00 - 0.99</th>
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<th>1.50 - 1.99</th>
<th>2.00 - 2.49</th>
<th>2.50 - 2.99</th>
<th>3.00 - 3.49</th>
<th>3.50 - 4.00</th>
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### Subgroup 8: Program Attrition by SPR and Student Category

**First Time Transfer Continuing Reinstates**

<table>
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<th>1.50 - 1.99</th>
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<th>2.50 - 2.99</th>
<th>3.00 - 3.49</th>
<th>3.50 - 4.00</th>
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### Subgroup 9f: Program Retention by GPA and Sex, Race, and Full-Time/Part-Time

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<tr>
<th>GPA Range</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.50 - 0.99</td>
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### Subgroup 10: Program Attrition by GPA and Sex, Race, and Full-Time/Part-Time

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<th>Female</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0</td>
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