

## IMPROVING STUDENT RETENTION

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### 1. Evaluate the nature of the retention problem

The retention and persistence of students is a complex issue. Just knowing your cohort graduation rate isn't enough. You need to get at the root of the problem through careful analysis of your student population.

Work with the institutional research department to disaggregate the retention and persistence data of various populations in your department, including students of color, Pell-eligible students, students from certain geographic areas, resident vs. commuter students, etc.

Your evaluation should not focus just on persistence-to-degree rates. Try to uncover why students are transferring, and where is it they are transferring.

### 2. Then, evaluate why your students leave

Ultimately, you need to know why students leave. There's an entire body of literature about this topic, but ultimately you need to know why *your* students leave, not someone in an "average" institution in an "average" state. **Exit interviews** are an effective tool to understand why your students chose to leave. Exit interviews are extraordinarily important opportunities to capture information on why your students leave, and what role your department played in the departure decision. Once you've collected and analyzed this information, then can you start asking questions about how you may better serve students.

Read also

[Helping students finish the 4-year run](#) via *The Chronicle of Higher Education*+

[Student success: A team effort](#) via *Academic Impressions*