Addressing At-Risk Students through Retention Initiatives

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Here we go

- Why
- What
  - *What we already know*
- How
- What I found
- So what?

Outcomes

- Develop a greater understanding of student retention literature
- Be exposed to the secondary research process
- Develop a greater understanding of the current state of retention initiatives
- Recognize opportunities available to improve retention initiatives

Retention

a rate or percentage of students who return from one enrollment period to another
(Habley, Bloom & Robbins, 2012)

Attrition

the "non-continuation" of students
(Higher Education Academy, 2015)

Persistence

the "ability of students to continue their post-secondary studies from one year to the next"
(Parkin & Baldwin, 2009, p. 65)

At-risk students

students or student groups with a higher probability of attrition
(The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013)

Retention initiative

an institutional effort aimed at supporting at-risk students

Terms

Why

- **Societal level**
  - critical to prosperity and quality of life (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009)
  - cultural and social development, and civic participation (Ferguson & Wang, 2014)
- **Individual level**
  - greatest path to a quality job in Canada; higher pay and lower rates of unemployment (Ferguson & Wang, 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014)

"A college or university, once having admitted a student, has an obligation to do what it can to help the student stay and graduate"

(Tinto, 2012, p.6)

Why

Student retention has become a "preeminent performance indicator" (Albert, 2010, p.1)

MRU aims to be within the top ten percent among Canadian universities in student retention by 2025 (MRU, 2015)

What

How are Canadian HE institutions utilizing retention initiatives to address at-risk students?

*How do existing retention initiatives **identify** at-risk students?*

*How are at-risk students being **supported** through existing retention initiatives?*

*How are existing retention initiatives being **assessed**?*

What we already know

Theory of Student Integration (Tinto, 1975)

- Durkheim's Theory of Suicide (1961)
- Integration into the academic and social systems most directly relates to persistence
- Higher levels of integration, higher levels of commitment

Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984)

- Student involvement: Quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy a student invests in the HE experience
- Greater student involvement, greater levels of student learning and development

Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985)

- attempts to address gaps of previous theories
- Nontraditional students: Part-time, commuter, or 24+
- Less interactions on campus, more environmental variables

What we already know

Student characteristics impacting retention

- **Demographics**
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Race & ethnicity
- **Academics**
  - High school academics
  - GPA
- **Psychosocial**
  - Emotional intelligence
  - Coping skills & resiliency
  - Mental wellness

What we already know

Student Supports & Interventions

- Four areas repeatedly cited as the most important retention initiatives over four decades of research (Habley et al. 2012):
    - Assessment and course placement
    - Developmental education initiatives
    - Academic advising
    - Student transition programming
- Learning analytics
    - Analysis of student data
    - Predictive models

What we already know

The changing student population

- ○ Internationalization
- ○ Indigenization
- ○ Mental health

As HE students become increasingly diverse, the interactional effects of student characteristics become more important
(Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, as cited in Reason, 2009).

How

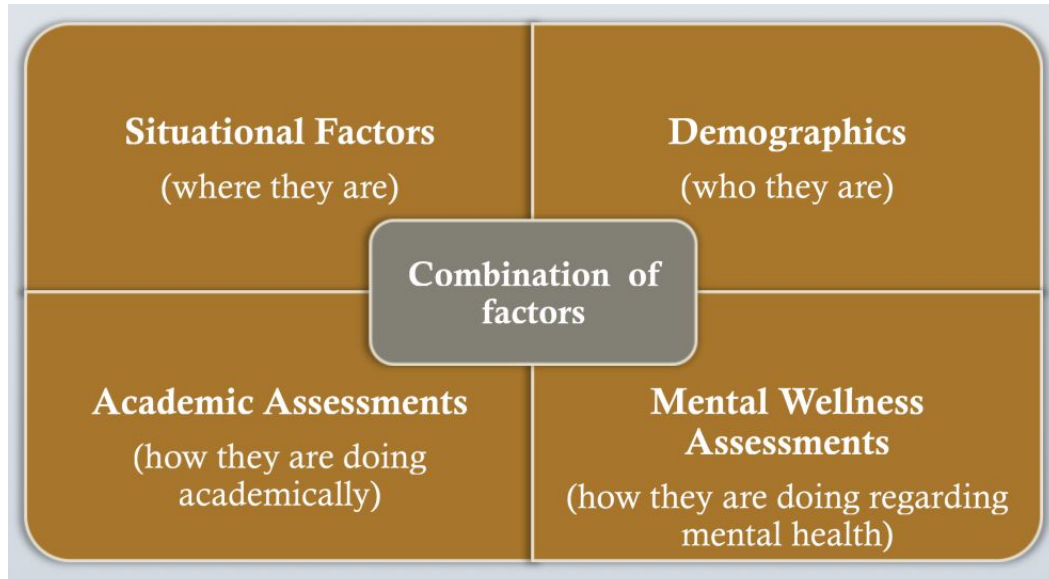Secondary research - meta-synthesis, qualitative

All records (27) focused on *individual retention initiatives* from 2010-2016

Coding used to organize findings

Limitations - Access to Canadian research, personal biases

What I found

How do existing retention initiatives identify at-risk students?

What I found

How are at-risk students being supported through existing retention initiatives?

Associated Retention Initiatives	Developmental Education Initiatives					Academic Advising	First Year Transition Programs		
	Remedial Coursework	Supplemental Instruction	Tutoring	Early Warning System	Other		Orientation	First Year Seminar	Learning Community
Total:	1	3	5	5	15	11	1	2	4

Adapted from Habley et al.'s (2012) four areas repeatedly cited as being the most important retention initiatives

Mental health and/or mentorship components not represented within the four areas, but present in several initiatives

What I found

How are existing retention initiatives being assessed?

- Retention rates (by program, first to second year, etc.)
- Graduation rates
- Course withdrawal rates
- Grades (course and GPA)
- Changes in academic standing
- Credit accrual
- Qualitative data (focus groups, interviews, etc.)
- Other ("better than expected" GPA, mental wellness)

So what?

- Psychosocial characteristics
  - Identifying at-risk students
    - Learning analytics
  - Assessing the impacts of initiatives
    - Incorporating institutional and student success

So what?

- Expanding the view of retention initiatives
  - Frameworks need to be updated
    - "Psychosocial development" or "non-academic growth"
  - The positive impact of supports on psychosocial characteristics "may be an implicit pathway by which programs exert their beneficial effects on retention, but these pathways are **rarely an explicit part of the dialogue**" (Eisenberg, Lipson & Posselt, 2016, p. 88).
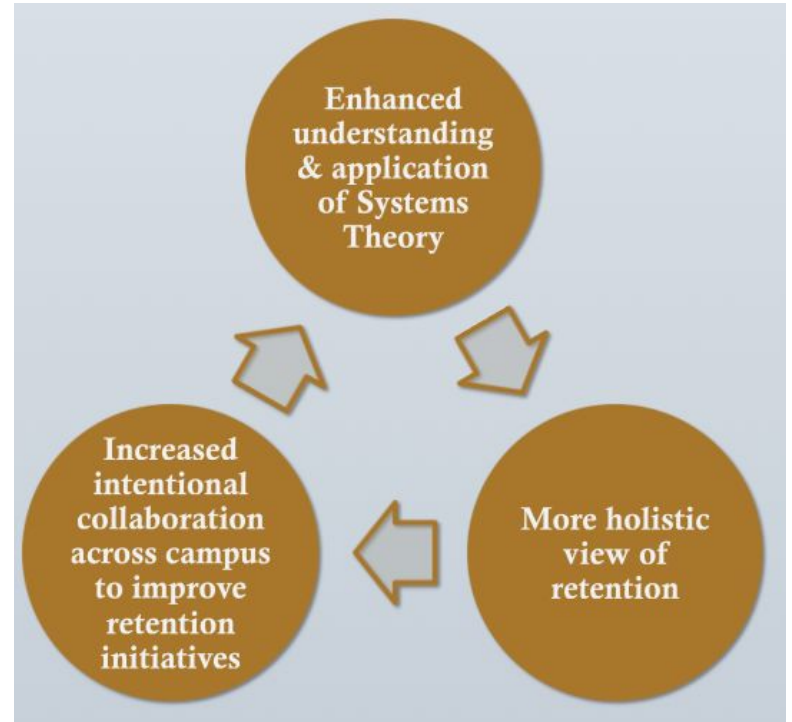
Now What?

- Consider the "So What?"
  - How does this information relate to the context of your role?
  - Key takeaways

Now what?

Holistic, collaborative approach

Institutional objectives to enhance student retention cannot be understood or implemented effectively without first having an understanding of the varying parts of the institution and how they interact
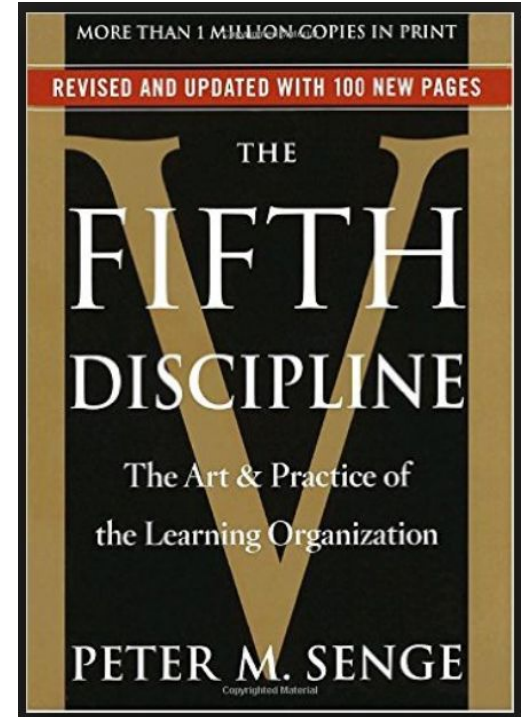
Systems thinking

Now what?

More research!

- Psychosocial characteristics
- Learning Analytics
- Retention initiatives in Canada
- Secondary research!
- Systems theory and its application within HE
  - Understanding varying parts & how they interact
  - Holistic, collaborative approach
  - Success from both an institutional & student development perspective

Questions?
Comments?

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