

# RETENTION REVIEW NEWSLETTER



University College  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

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## Did You Know?



Emotional investment can make it difficult to see the forest for the trees. As an instructor, I have frequently found myself so focused on one or two trees that I have been wholly unable to see the forest. Why did Student A struggle so much with the last quiz? Were my questions confusing? Did I fail to present the material adequately? I care about this student: can I make the situation better for Student A? Why does Student B keep missing deadlines? Are my instructions confusing? Are the consequences for late work too small to encourage timely completion of work? Are the consequences too *big* to be realistic, meaning that Student B has simply shut down in frustration? I care about this student: can I make the situation better for Student B?

If you're like me, you've been in much the same situation: you care about your students, and you are committed to seeing them succeed. In fact, you may be so committed to your students' success that the metaphorical trees of their individual struggles blind you to the metaphorical forest of their overarching accomplishments. You easily forget that students' visible struggles in one class or on one or two assignments or assessments do not define the whole of their lives, their academic careers, and the possibilities that await them. Moreover, you may get so caught up in efforts to support struggling students that you overlook the "forest" of success achieved by the class as a whole. I am as guilty of such "forest blindness" as the next person!

Because of my own "forest blindness," I found it helpful (and comforting) to review end-of-semester data about the students who were included in the 3rd-week attendance pilot

conducted last fall by University College with the help of 51 instructors who teach introductory-level courses.

The pilot, which included 2,571 first- and second-year students, identified students who were struggling with attendance early in the semester. This project provided not only a valuable opportunity for direct outreach to students but also a valuable baseline for comparison with fifth-week progress reports. Nearly three-quarters of the students included in this year's third-week attendance pilot were enrolled with instructors who routinely submit fifth-week progress reports. The overlap of populations made it easy to see how many students struggled with attendance or academic concerns in both Week 3 and Week 5.

After making an initial comparison of third-week and fifth-week data, I suffered a bit of "forest blindness." Of the 86 students included in both weeks and identified for outreach during the third-week attendance campaign, 59 students—nearly 69% of the group—continued to struggle with attendance or academic performance in the fifth week. I was so focused on those 59 students that I failed to notice the 27 students (31%) who were *not* still struggling with attendance or academic concerns in the fifth week.

When I compared third-week, fifth-week, and end-of-semester data this week, my "forest blindness" finally began to clear. Of those 59 students who struggled with attendance or academic concerns in both Week 3 and Week 5, one-quarter nevertheless finished the semester in good academic standing. Moreover, all 59 of these students have returned for the spring semester, suggesting that they are committed to making a fresh start and achieving their highest potential. Finally, I was encouraged to see that 41% of students who were reported as struggling in either Week 3 or Week 5, but not in both weeks, finished the semester in good academic standing. This news bodes well for the "forest view."

Such an encouraging view of the "forest" is echoed by institutional data on post-graduation outcomes for UWSP alumni. [Exit survey data](#) consistently indicates that over 70% of UWSP graduates are employed or pursuing additional educational or professional credentials within five months of graduating.

The optimistic "forest view" painted by our exit survey data can be hard to envision when we see individual students struggle early in their academic career. Instead of losing sight of the forest, each of us can take concrete steps, such as those outlined below, to help students overcome individual setbacks on their way to success!

## Looking beyond the trees to the forest: Tips for helping students overcome temporary setbacks.

- Refer students to the Tutoring-Learning Center (TLC) for academic coaching or for support with content in a specific course. [Click here to access a list of courses for which tutoring support is currently available.](#)
- Refer students to the Focal Point program, which supports students in returning to good academic standing. Contact [Annette Hackbarth-Onson](#) for more information about Focal Point.
- Refer students to the UWSP [Emergency Aid Application](#). Students may be eligible for an emergency grant from the university to cover unexpected medical expenses, car repairs, etc.
- Encourage students to create a free account in the [Mantra Whole Campus Care](#) mental wellness app.
- Issue a Navigate alert to let Diversity and College Access (DCA), the Disability Resource Center (DRC), Financial Aid, the TLC and/or retention staff members know that a student needs support with a specific concern, such as testing accommodations or paying an outstanding tuition balance.
- Issue a Dean of Students (DOS) [Student of Concern report](#) to let DOS staff members know that a student needs support with broad-based concerns, such as chronic health concerns. When in doubt, issue a Navigate “refer to advisor or other support” alert; our team will make sure the alert makes it to the right staff member!

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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