

## ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

### Special Features

- NWFSC's Retention Research and Efforts
- Impact of Withdrawals on Student Success

### Regular Features

- Research Factoid
- Fast Facts
- Web Sightings

## FAST FACTS

- Sixty-two percent of the 2008-2009 Florida high school graduates enrolled in Florida's 28 colleges for the 2009-2010 academic year.
- In 2010, the Florida College System joined the **Complete College America Alliance**, pledging to double the number of graduates by the year 2020.
- The increased number of graduates in 2015-2016 is projected to add over \$33 billion to Florida's economy and provide economic activity that will lead to the creation of 250,000 jobs.—*Florida Taxwatch*

## WEB SIGHTINGS

- **Complete College America** — non-profit organization working with states to achieve more college degrees and credentials of value: <http://www.completecollege.org>
- **Faculty Focus** — topics & articles for higher ed professionals; also features Teaching Professor Blog: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/topic/articles/>

## RETENTION RESEARCH AND EFFORTS

In the Spring semester of 2010, the Curriculum Committee tasked an ad hoc committee, including Lisa Struck, Lynn Horrigan, Mike Van Dyke, Gail Baker, and Kathy McNair, to research retention strategies for Northwest Florida State College. The committee focused on two groups, with some overlap, as indicated in Table 1.0, below:

| Target Groups  | Research Questions   | Methods   |
|--|--|---|
| Students who withdraw from classes   | Why do these students withdraw?  | Embed a survey in the RaiderNet online withdrawal process       |
| Students who enroll in one semester and do not return during the rest of the academic year | Can these students be encouraged to return by contacting them via U.S. mail? | Send postcards to the identified students urging them to return |

To find out why NWFSC students withdraw from classes, the committee worked with the college's Information Technology department and Beth Kuntz to implement a survey that students will complete as they withdraw from a class on RaiderNet. This survey should be in place in Summer 2011 and will provide immediate feedback on reasons for students' withdrawals. The committee expects to see many of the same reasons cited in the literature, e.g., illness, financial need, and class schedule conflicting with work and family responsibilities, but also anticipates that some responses will shed light on problems that NWFSC may be able to minimize through advising. These may include an excessively heavy course load or academic unpreparedness for certain courses. The brief survey also includes an open-ended question asking what could have helped the students stay enrolled in course(s).

To discover whether students can be encouraged to return to college after an absence, in Summer 2010, postcards were mailed to approximately 1,630 students who had enrolled in Fall 2009 and had not enrolled in either Spring or Summer 2010. (See below for a graphic of the postcard.) Students receiving the postcard enrolled in the following semester at a greater rate than a control group, who had enrolled in Fall 2008 and not returned in Spring or Summer 2009. See Table 2.0. on reverse side.

*(Article continued on reverse side)*



NWFSC HAD OVER  
**2,000 SUCCESS STORIES**  
ON 2010 GRADUATION DAY...

*Return to NWF State College for your Success by Degrees!*

NORTHWEST FLORIDA  
STATE COLLEGE  
100 College Boulevard  
Niceville, Florida 32578-1295

Niceville 729-6922, Ft. Walton 863-6500,  
Crestview 689-7911, DeFuniak Springs 892-8100,  
Eglin AFB 678-1717, Hurlburt Field 884-6296,  
South Walton 267-2888

You made a great choice to enroll at NWFSC this year – but we missed you this past term! If you need assistance to get back on track for your educational goals – we're here to help! Call or stop by any of NWFSC's seven area locations for help to get back in college for Fall Term. Expanded summer hours now to July 31 are Mon. thru Thurs. from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm (closed on Fri.) at all NWFSC sites except Eglin (regular Mon. thru Fri. hours apply at Eglin).

Address Service Requested

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 28  
Niceville, FL

- Fall Term enrollment begins July 19 for Returning Students
- Fall Classes start Aug. 23 & Oct. 15

EA/EO

## RESEARCH FACTOID

### CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Ellen Smyth reports on research into traits that make professors effective, in students' eyes. Whether the course is delivered traditionally or online, the same characteristics prove valuable to students:

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <u>Effective Online Professors</u> | <u>Effective Traditional Professors</u> |
|------------------------------------|---|

- |                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Respectful    | Respectful    |
| 2. Responsive    | Knowledgeable |
| 3. Knowledgeable | Approachable  |
| 4. Approachable  | Engaging      |
| 5. Communicative | Communicative |
| 6. Organized     | Organized     |
| 7. Engaging      | Responsive    |
| 8. Professional  | Professional  |
| 9. Humorous      | Humorous      |

**Reference:**

Smyth, Ellen (2011). *What Students Want: Characteristics of Effective Teachers from the Students' Perspective*. *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved April 18, 2011 from <http://www.facultyfocus.com>.

## RETENTION RESEARCH AND EFFORTS — CONTINUED

**Table 2.0 Postcard Strategy Results**

|  | Control Group  | Experimental Group   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Population characteristics</b>  | Enrolled in Fall 2008<br>Did not enroll in Spring or Summer 2009 | Enrolled in Fall 2009<br>Did not enroll in Spring or Summer 2010   |
| <b>Number of students</b>  | 1,761  | 1,630  |
| <b>Variable</b>  | N/A  | Received postcard from NWFSC urging them to re-enroll in Fall 2010 |
| <b>Number of students who re-enrolled in the Fall following absence</b>                | 253  | 431  |
| <b>Percentage of group who returned the Fall following an absence of two semesters</b> | 14%  | 26%  |

This research should be repeated to see if the correlation between receiving the postcard and re-enrolling persists. It is possible that the April 2009 oil spill and poor economy drove students back, regardless of the postcard. However, if the postcard is effective, it will be a cost-effective way to encourage students to complete their post-secondary education.

## IMPACT OF WITHDRAWALS ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Nationwide, fewer than 30% of community college students earn an associate's degree within three years (Complete College America). In Florida, only five of every one hundred ninth graders graduate with an associate's degree within three years of enrolling in a community college; five more graduate with a bachelor's in four years (Complete College America).

These statistics and the United States' decline in the ranking of college-educated citizens, coupled with the need for post-secondary credentials in the job market, have given rise to the college graduation initiatives prevalent today. Race to the Top, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation are some of the better known efforts and agencies in this field. The Gates Foundation's report *With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them* identifies work conflicts as the primary reason that students do not complete college, and the balancing act between employment and college is especially critical in the student's first year. Among community college students, 60% work 20 hours a week, and more than 25% work over 35 hours a week. (This largely urban sample included students who had either attended or graduated from both two- and four-year programs.) Institutions can improve scheduling and nontraditional course offerings to accommodate more students, and even smaller changes can help. Tightening the lenient withdrawal policies of most institutions and active interventions may help more students stay in college.

In 2006, the Florida Department of Education replicated an earlier federal study examining the impact of no-penalty withdrawals and of failing grades on students' persistence in college (*The Impact of Withdrawing from Courses [Revisited]*). First-time-in-college students seeking an associate's degree in a community college were tracked for five years. Overall, the college-ready students in the cohort were quite successful, as noted in Table 3.0. However, these students accounted for only 28.3% of the cohort; 71.7% of the cohort required remediation, or developmental coursework. Furthermore, once college-ready students started accumulating significant (over 20%) W or F grades, their success rate plummeted. Students needing remediation were, predictably, less successful in every category.

**References**

- Complete College America. *The Completion Shortfall*. Retrieved April 18, 2011 from <http://www.completecollege.org/completion-shortfall/>
- Johnson, J. and Richkind, J. (2009). *With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them: Myths and Realities About Why So Many Students Fail to Finish College*. Public Agenda, with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Retrieved April 18, 2011 from <http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/theirwholylivesaheadofthem.pdf>
- Florida Department of Education. *The Impact of Withdrawing from Courses (Revisited)*. Retrieved April 18, 2011 from <http://www.broward.edu/facts/SupportingContent/Impact%20of%20Withdrawing%20from%20Courses%20Revisited.pdf>

**Table 3.0 Impact of W's on Student Success**

|  | Percent of Students Earning Award, Transferring to SUS, or Still Enrolled |
|--|---|
| <b>Entire Cohort</b>                           |   |
| College Ready                                  | 60.5  |
| Requiring Remediation                          | 39.8  |
| <b>Students with Less than 20% of W Grades</b> |   |
| College Ready                                  | 68.6  |
| Requiring Remediation                          | 46.8  |
| <b>Students with More than 20% of W Grades</b> |   |
| College Ready                                  | 35.7  |
| Requiring Remediation                          | 26.1  |
| <b>Students with Less than 20% of F Grades</b> |   |
| College Ready                                  | 70.5  |
| Requiring Remediation                          | 48.8  |
| <b>Students with More than 20% of F Grades</b> |   |
| College Ready                                  | 27.0  |
| Requiring Remediation                          | 20.0  |

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**BRIGHT IDEAS**

If you have a newsletter suggestion or a research idea, please contact us at: [ir@nwfsc.edu](mailto:ir@nwfsc.edu) or 729-5363.

