

Results-Oriented Student Retention/ Graduation Strategies: *Incorporating Peer Mentors into First-Year Programs & Courses*

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- Total Enrollment = 12,000
10,200 undergraduate students
- Location: Cedar Falls, IA
- Primarily residential, serving Iowa and the region
- Carnegie classification = Master's Large, Very High Undergraduate

Impact of Peer to Peer Interactions

- Peer interactions the strongest influence on student learning and development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)
- Significant gains on several measures of:
 - intellectual, identity, and social development
 - leadership
 - civic and political engagement
 - retention/graduation
 - well-being
- Most influential peer-to-peer interactions are those with diverse peers (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, Wolniak, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2016)

Types of Peer Mentor Programs

- Teaching Assistants (TAs) in lecture courses
- Supplemental Instruction
- Living-learning community mentors
- Peer tutors
- Mentors within first-year success courses/seminars



UNI Course-Embedded Model

- Peer mentors placed within “first-year only” (FYO) sections of general education courses
- Highly collaborative across university divisions
 - Host faculty, peer mentors, academic advising, financial aid, academic support services, etc.
- Developmental value of the near peer
- Classroom as community (Tinto, 2000; Johansson & Felten, 2014)

Course-Embedded Peer Mentor Impact

- Positive effects of course-embedded peer mentoring:
 - **Student learning** (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Witt, & Associates, 2010); **GPA** (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003); **writing and critical thinking** (Kuh et al, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)
 - **Social and emotional support and development** (Cuseo, n.d.; Henry, Bruland, & Sano-Franchini, 2011); **reduced psychological stress** (Fantuzzo, Riggio, Connelly, & Dimeff, 1989)

Theoretical Framework for Retention and Student Success

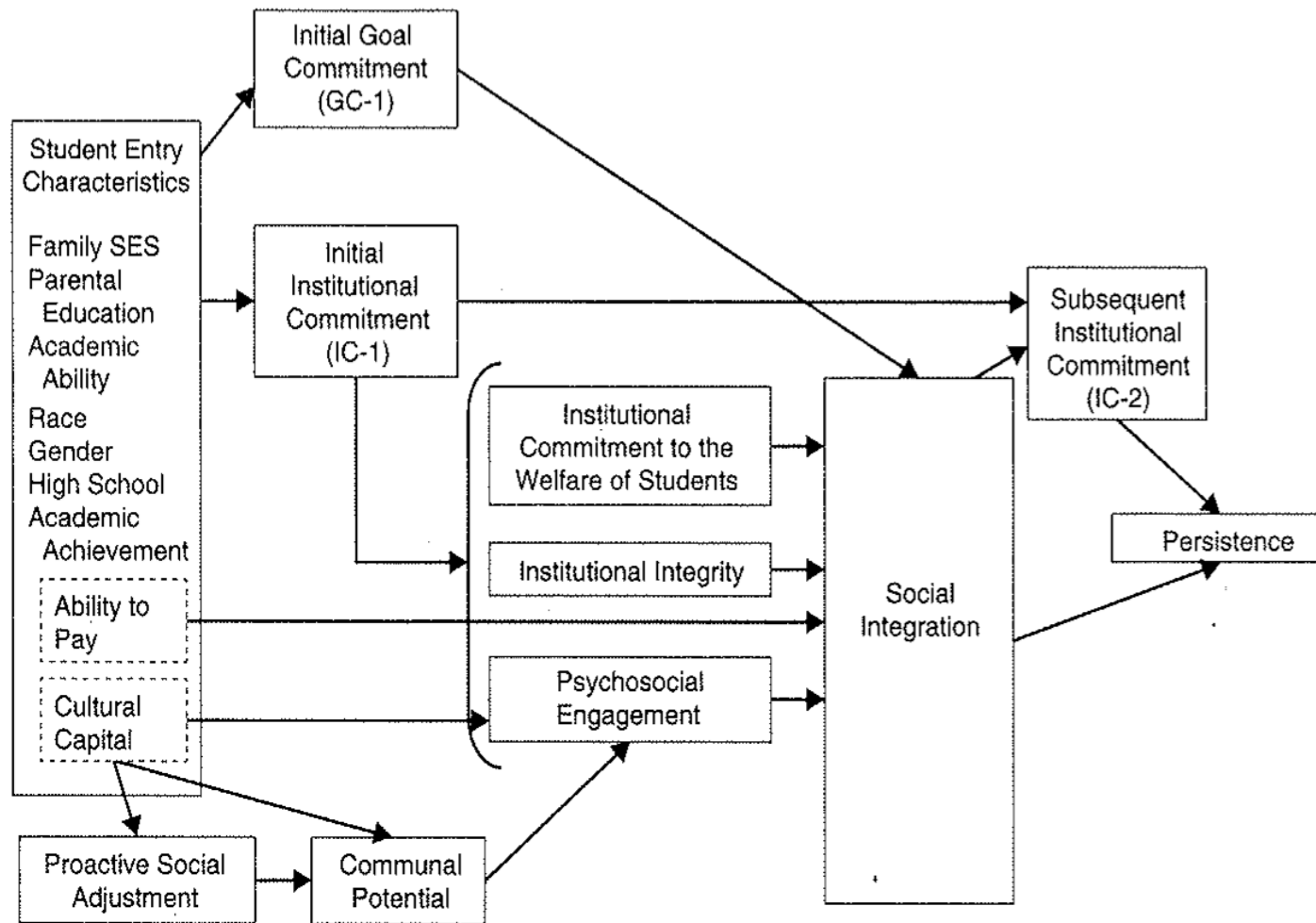


Figure 10.1 Toward a revision of the theory of student persistence in residential colleges and universities.

Braxton, J.M., Doyle, W. R., Hartley, H. V., Hirschy, A. S., Jones, W. A., & McLendon, M. K. (2014). *Rethinking College Student Retention*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Social Integration

- Student's perception of membership in the campus social environment, with an emphasis on peer relationships (Braxton et al, 2014)
 - Occurs at the level of the university, or at the level of a subculture of the institution
 - Direct and positive influence on student persistence in college

Influences on Social Integration

- **Ability to pay**

degree of satisfaction about costs of attending chosen college (Braxton et al, 2014); inability to pay acts as barrier to student participation in social communities (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990)

- **Institutional commitment to student welfare**

culture of concern for student growth and development; student perception that they are valued and respected as individuals, and treated equitably (Braxton and Hirschy, 2004)

Influences on Social Integration

- **Institutional integrity**

student perception that actions of college faculty and staff are consistent with espoused mission and goals (Braxton et al, 2014)

- **Psychosocial engagement**

“... the amount of psychological energy students invest in their social interactions with peers and in their participation in extracurricular activities (Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2004)” (as cited in Braxton et al, 2014, p. 90)

First Year Programs Implementation

Fall 2008	Foundations of Excellence
Fall 2009	First Year Council-Academic and Student Affairs
Fall 2011	First-Year Cornerstone First-Year peer mentor program Mapworks early intervention system
Fall 2012	First-Year Only (FYO) general education courses
Fall 2015	UNI Now extended orientation program Transfer course-embedded peer mentor program
Spring 2016	Success Coaching program Humanities Supportive Seminars
Fall 2017	AASCU Promising Practices Award

First Year Program Growth

2011-2012  2016-2017

9	58	First-Year Only sections
11	59	Peer mentors
13%	86%	Freshmen enrolled in FYO course

New initiatives

2	Transfer-only sections with peer mentors
7	Success Coaches
12	Supportive Seminars for Humanities

Most Common Peer Mentor Activities

- Give presentations on first-year topics (98%)
- Meet one-on-one with students (96%)
- Meet regularly with instructor for planning (88%)
- Announce campus engagement opportunities (88%)
- Taking attendance (70%)
- Grade assignments or exams (62%)
- Meet with students about Mapworks results (60%)

Preliminary Results

Since the program's inception in fall 2011, the retention rate of first-year students enrolled a peer-mentor supported section has been **6 – 8% higher** as compared to other first-year students.



Recruiting and Selecting Peer Mentors

- [Position description](#)
- Online application process
- FYO faculty and peer mentor recommendations
- One group and two individual interviews
- Nearly 100 applicants for approximately 60 positions



Training Peer Mentors

Spring workshop

UNIV 3186: Seminar

- Common first year issues
- Resource Fridays
- Peer Mentor plans
- Presentations



Selecting Host Instructors

- Outreach from Academic Advising to Department Heads
- “Invitation to teach”
- Peer mentor nomination request
- Peer mentor matching communication
- Encourage student engagement assignments

Faculty responses to “invitation to teach”

Hell yes. (Math professor)

Absolutely! Count me in. Thank you for the opportunity! (Humanities instructor)

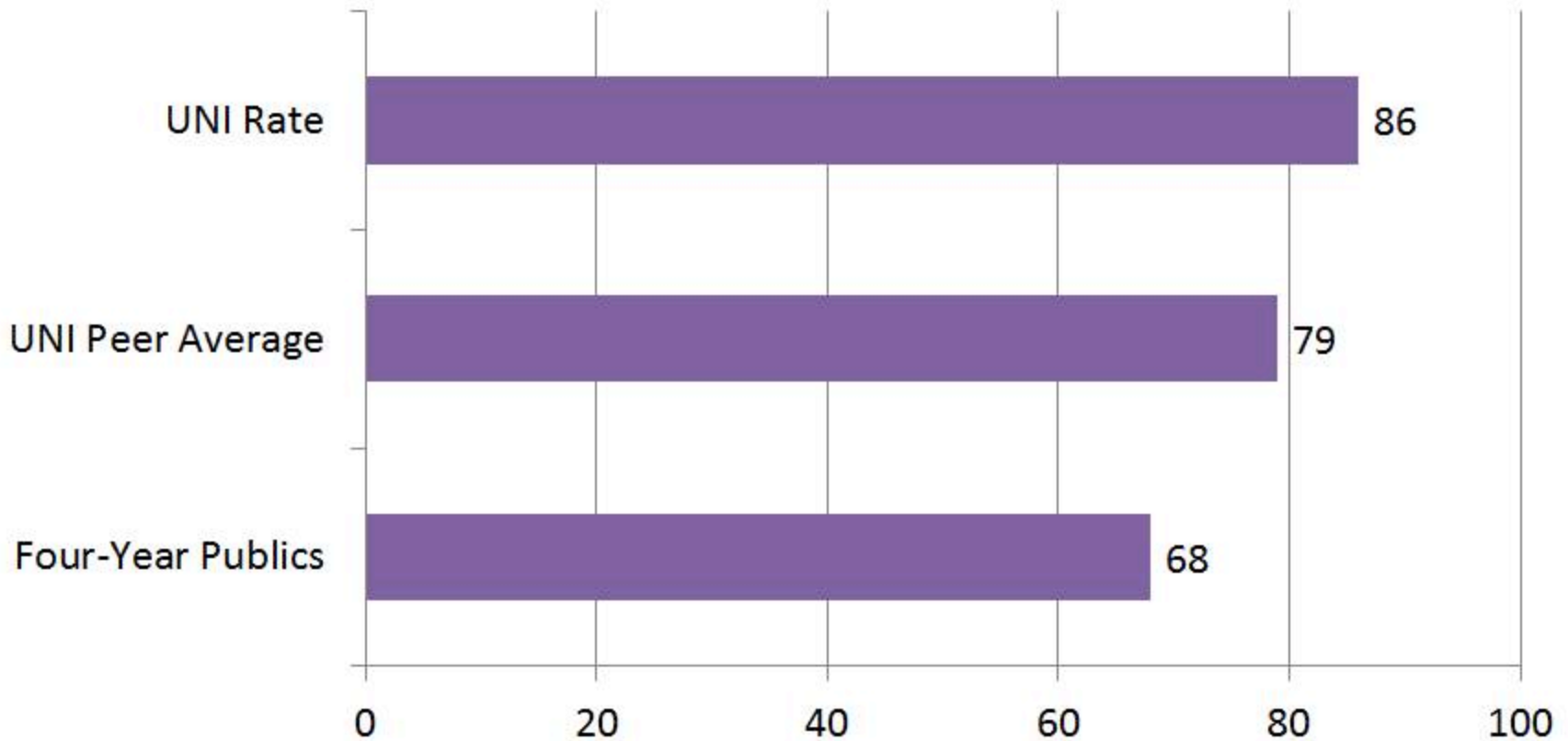
Yes! Yes! Yes! - Your biggest FYO fan! (Religion professor)

Yes! Yes! Yes! Thanks for the informative email! (Music professor)

Absolutely 100% all in! (All three sections of humanities) (Humanities instructor)

Thank you for this invitation! I would be delighted to be a part of the FYO program and transitioning my current Religions of the World class to fit the needs of first year students. Please let me know what my next steps are to move forward as a part of the program. (new Religion faculty)

UNI Retention Rate



Transfer-Only Peer Mentoring



Differences from FYO sections

- Higher need areas:
 - financial education (per MW)
 - navigating academic advising
 - non-AA students
- Less interest/response:
 - office hours
 - social activities as a group
- Used resources provided by PMs, but less likely to meet and discuss

Success Coaching

- One-to-one peer coaching for students on academic alert and probation
- 5 – 7 former peer mentors hired to serve over 300 students each semester
- Active approach to coaching, connecting students to campus resources

Success Coaching Results, Spring 2017

- Students on probation who met with a coach:
 - **at least one time** retained at a rate **14.3% higher** than those who did not
 - **3 or more times** retained at a rate **23.3% higher**
- All students who met with a coach 6 or more times (roughly every other week) retained to the next semester

Peer Mentor and Success Coach Panel

- **Cece Hawbaker**
 - Junior Communication Studies major
 - Peer mentor in UNIV 1000: First-Year Cornerstone
- **Isaac Newsome**
 - May 2017 graduate in General Studies
 - Success coach, spring 2017
- **Shelby Schroeder**
 - Junior Elementary Education major
 - Peer mentor in COMM 1000: Oral Communication

Questions?

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