

# Student Retention: Faculty Strategic Planning in Higher Education Special Issue—Leadership and Organizational Management

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## Abstract

Prior researchers reviewed to understand student retention in higher learning and how various leadership in education faculty decision-making theories can assist student-faculty interactions. The organized collection of resources was from scholarly articles found in GCU Alumni Access Library for Business Source Alumni Edition through EBSCO and Educator's Reference Complete Alumni through Gale Alumni Database. Peer-reviewed empirical seminal sources support the need for the study presented. This literature review can add to the study of student retention and equip faculty with effective faculty decision-making practices for student retention.

## Keywords

Student Retention, Faculty Decision-Making, Leadership in Education

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## 1. Introduction

Faculty decision-making that aids student retention in higher education is a significant and hotly debated issue. Focusing on student retention resolutions is essential as it can provide hiring employers with adequately skilled workers (McKnight, 2020; Senters, 2020). College student rates impact our economy (Winters, 2018). Awareness of what influences students to remain in their higher education programs can help introduce strategies to faculty that meet students' needs (Dawkins, 2023). This literature review aims to review prior research to understand how student retention in higher learning and how various theories relating to faculty decision-making in leadership education can assist in student-faculty interactions. When various strategic plans relating to educational

faculty decision-making are better understood, faculty can strategically decide how they interact with students.

Understanding the need for student retention and equipping faculty with effective decision-making practices for student retention topics can become a relic of time. The review of the literature is to understand student retention in higher learning and how various theories relating to faculty decision-making can assist in student-faculty interactions. Peer-reviewed empirical seminal sources on student retention, strategic planning about faculty decision-making, and student-faculty interactions gathered from peer-reviewed empirical seminal sources retrieved from GCU Alumni access Library for Business Source Alumni Edition, through EBSCO and Educator's Reference Complete Alumni, through Gale Alumni Databases. By understanding various strategic plans relating to decision-making, faculty can better decide how they interact with students.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Student Retention in Higher Education

Faculty members play an essential role in education when implementing a strategic plan to encourage student retention. Student retention tendencies in students can help students meet employer hiring demands and alleviate the risks of unskilled workers (McKnight, 2020; Senters, 2020). Within this literature review, publications containing insights suggest a need to understand faculty strategic planning to obtain student retention.

Research studies relating to student enrollment in education can provide insight into why students enroll and whether they remain in a program. Dawkins (2023) researched trends in undergraduate enrollment in accounting programs. The research conducted was to understand further the challenges, causes, and solutions for the enrollment challenges in undergraduate accounting programs. Trends examined were in 1) enrollments from public colleges and universities, 2) accounting program enrollments, 3) accounting hiring, and 4) CPA exam trends. Identifying early on challenges is critical. Structural barriers to obtaining a CPA have become onerous. Unfortunately, the compensation packages are unattractive to new-hire CPAs (Dawkins, 2023). Dawkins's (2023) research resulted in trends of the awareness of professionals gravitating to becoming more skilled when it related to top-tier students. Awareness of compensation packages can influence if a student wants to remain in a program. Students might elect to change their program or end it after determining that the compensation is unattractive. Dawkins (2023) interprets the findings to suggest strategies to introduce an accounting program that meets the student's needs. Making the accounting program attractive includes recruiting firms, a modern curriculum, transparency of compensation early on, a knowledgeable, innovative, and enthusiastic faculty, and ensuring enticing salaries.

A quantitative study of value co-creation, value-in-use, customer satisfaction,

and switching costs was conducted. [Coelho Nunes et al. \(2021\)](#) surveyed 301 higher education students through a Theoretical Model to understand how to retain students in higher education. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. [Coelho Nunes et al. \(2021\)](#) researched to determine which constructs effectively demonstrated student retention. [Coelho Nunes et al. \(2021\)](#) interpret the findings as having no consensus on which construct proved effective in student retention. Suggestions for further research were to seek data from various institutions in addition to that of public and private.

There is a demand for faculty to be culturally adept. [Ramsey and Lorenz \(2016\)](#) explored the cross-cultural management impacts on a cultural intelligence course to understand student satisfaction and commitment. [Ramsey and Lorenz's \(2016\)](#) research was quasi-experimental and surveyed 152 MBA students taking a cross-cultural management course. The findings demonstrated that students' commitment was related to their satisfaction with their course. The recommendations for this study were to investigate the impacts of cultural intelligence and students' improvement based on performance variables. The research was conducted to understand influences and suggest other extensions to the study. [Winters \(2018\)](#) suggests that college graduates are essential for the economy. College graduates' rates impact the economy ([Winters, 2018](#)). [Winters \(2018\)](#) researched the descriptive relationship between college graduate rates from students in and out of state using the decennial census and American Community Survey microdata instrumental variables (IV) methods used to estimate the causal effects of college graduate rates. The results demonstrated that the rates decreased with the student's age. [Winters \(2018\)](#) suggests that states may benefit from investing in education. Motivating students can be challenging, and educators face challenges in inspiring students.

## **2.2. Strategic Planning in Faculty Decision-Making**

The researcher conducted on five themes: logistical, safety, pedagogical, environmental, and group dynamics. [Boyes & Potter \(2015\)](#) researched faculty decision-making in a higher learning institution in the Southern Alps of New Zealand. Recognition-primed decisions (RPD) within naturalistic decision-making (NDM) contexts were used in the exploration. The researcher searched for themes relating to outdoor education faculty decision-making made, displayed, and actioned. The study allowed for teachable moments to be captured and explored. [Boyes & Potter \(2015\)](#) suggests that due to outdoor education presenting unique faculty decision-making with complexity, to teach effectively, it is essential to ensure teachers have "comprehensive knowledge of how and why decisions are made" ([Boyes & Potter, 2015: p. 13](#)). The experience resulted in fast responses from teachers, being a crucial part of the student's success.

Organizations need to improve the quality of information during their faculty decision-making processes. Decision-making can be effective, and a strategy should consider the environment. Creating positive relationships can help cultivate an

environment where decision-making cultures are present (Popovic & Habjan, 2012). Popovic and Habjan (2012) qualitatively analyzed medium and large organizations in Slovenia. Popovic and Habjan (2012) suggest there are implications for management and future research. There can be suppression where teachers are hesitant about decision-making cultures.

Data collected were of retreat activities and interview data collection of participant reactions to techniques. Lin and Eichelberger (2020) conducted a qualitative study to gain ten faculty; 2 were authors, facilitators, and reactions to the academic department's redesigned day-long meetings. The redesigned meetings included faculty decision-making techniques designed to help the participants through the thinking process of faculty decision-making. The findings resulted in participants appreciating the design thinking process online tools and support provided. Lin and Eichelberger mention that the participants were "inspired by the process and will continue to iterate on future redesigns of its communications and decision-making processes" (Lin & Eichelberger, 2020: p. 41). Faculty appreciate decision-making support from institutions' shared processes. Faculty decision-making process training allows faculty to see scenarios and navigate ways to make decisions.

A case study included data from yearly drop-out rate reports at Duy Tan University. Lan (2021) conducted a case study on applying Quality Management (QM) to Student Retention. The programs researched were Management Information Systems, Finance and Banking, Accounting, Business Administration, Civil Engineering, and Architecture. Results from the data collected suggestions listed were: 1) early identification, 2) early intervention, and 3) continuous intervention. Suggestions for future research include a scope explanation and research to understand significant reasons and drop-out rates. Webber (2021) researched to understand the work satisfaction of 42 faculty members at six four-year institutions. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher captured data, which resulted in overall findings that showed the differences in culture and other differences in 1) faculty perceptions of their work, 2) the institution's culture, and 3) interpersonal relationships of student and faculty (Webber, 2021). Exploring participants by gender, race/ethnicity, and salary differences was suggested for future research.

The participants for a mixed-methods study were instructors in mathematics, biology, geological sciences, chemistry, and physics from 977 graduate students, post-doctoral researcher instructors, and 436 respondents. Hora and Anderson (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study searching for norms in interactive teaching and how they relate to instructional decision-making in undergraduate instruction. The data collected were from semi-structured interviews containing 17 open-ended questions. The findings suggest that creating strong norms would require a focus on more central focuses than a single focus.

Prior research on universities adopting particular practices demonstrates how learning institutions can strategically put plans in place for student retention.

Through Institutional Theory, Wilkins and Huisman's (2012) exploration suggests universities should consider a "broad spectrum of motivations" and learn from one another. Prior research explores strategic management leadership in education. Hladchenko (2014) explored to understand perspectives in strategic management specific to higher education in the Ukraine. The data collected was from the student totals from the academic year of 1987/88 to 2012/13 and researched the development program of these universities—14 research universities creating development plans where five were publicly available development programs. The findings suggest how development programs can be the start of strategic management in higher education. Concerns surfaced as suitable conditions created for strategic management implementations were for further development.

### 2.3. Student Faculty Interactions

Higher learning institutions must be strategic when faculty decision-making institutional plan activities. Billups (2015) suggests success will come from leaders' involvement in planning to build a culture and context, positivity, and innovative conflict. Gaining different perspectives and opinions from prior research creates an environment where strategic planning can flourish. Student and Faculty interactions are where strategic planning should take priority.

A prior study reviewed was to understand socialization in interdisciplinary graduate programs within discipline-oriented institutions. Boden et al. (2011) researches the theoretical socialization framework in interdisciplinary doctoral programs concerning student socialization in an interview study. There were 43 students, professors, and administrators. Each was from a large university and had different interdisciplinary programs. The findings demonstrate the importance of student interactions to provide opportunities for integration and building relationships between students and faculty.

Based on the findings of a prior study, an action plan for teachers' sessions was defined to enhance student engagement. Bhargava (2021) conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis of methods and preparation to contribute to teaching sessions by gaining data from students' perspectives. The themes found were 1) students' disengagement identified as insufficient interpersonal communication, 2) lack of real-time application, 3) dearth of empathy, and 4) dubious personal behavior of teacher (Bhargava, 2021). Teacher sessions can enhance student engagement when strategically planned.

## 3. Summary

The literature reviewed was related to student retention and how faculty can strategically plan to inspire students in higher education. After accessing the research based on student retention, inspiring students when faculty has support in faculty decision-making on their strategic planning can be accomplished. The literature reviewed tends to have three common themes: 1) creating the right

culture, 2) developing faculty to be knowledgeable in planning, and 3) paying attention to student satisfaction. Creating a culture allows for catering to students' specific needs and how faculty can inspire them (Billups, 2015; Popovic & Habjan, 2012; Webber, 2021). It is crucial for student retention that faculty has opportunities to develop and gain knowledge that can inspire students (Dawkins, 2023; Webber, 2021). Student satisfaction must be paramount, including creating a positive environment (Ramsey & Lorenz, 2016; Lin & Eichelberger, 2020; Popovic & Habjan, 2012). Student retention must be a responsibility of faculty as it is also crucial for higher education institutions and their stakeholders. Prior research mimics one another as they recommend future research is a scope explanation and research to understand drop-out rates to accomplish student retention.

Limitations associated with this literature review consist of the review being of a small number of references. Having a small number of references can leave a perception of a broad review. Limitations can produce common problems indicating there was not enough information collected, but it opens an opportunity for further research. Future recommendations for further research are to review literature focused on a course program, methodology, and design, data collected such as participants' self-revealed information, or another narrower research. Suggestions for future study obtain additional insights as it may contribute to more extensive research in teaching sessions from gaining data from students' perspective.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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