



**PLANNING TO IMPROVE STUDENT PERSISTENCE  
(Round Table Questions)**

**I. What do you believe are the most important reasons as to why long-term persistence by students is becoming worse at the College?**

Economic reasons and family problems.

Students are not challenged.

Not all students want to work.

Student team work is vital (in class).

Student attitude: If students get passed out of high school for no work, than this will happen at the Community College of Philadelphia.

Certificate or degree programs that students were not accepted into.

Non-realistic expectations of college level work.

A lack of prestige and reputational excellence.

Financial gap-financial aid versus cost. Welfare restrictions kick in.

It is puzzling because McClenny's account of students completing level courses with a fifteen credit and good advising plan (equaling high goal expectations), compared with our better short term persistence ought to equal a better student persistence rate.

Perhaps the need for or lure of more immediate money pulls them away.

Staff is less student-oriented, probably due to understaffing.

The staff lacks actual knowledge of what the student needs, and where the student needs to go, i.e., knowledge of services offered by the Community College of Philadelphia.

External forces: Depressed economy which brings about poverty, and the war, which apparently never ends!

Issues related to financial concerns caused by the availability of jobs and financial aid.

Does the College focus on the long-term value of learning and the changes that formal education offers?

Climate of absence of opportunity.

Less than effective integrated academic advising and learning support.

The percentage of new students who are too ill prepared for the Community College of Philadelphia, even with support.

Our own lack of understanding transfers versus career, and part-time, versus full-time.

Inadequate advising combined with too many students “self advising” because the advising process is not required.

There are no college-wide integrated Freshman Seminars tied to the advising program.

A lack of critical thinking skills in the background of the new student.

Students see the Community College of Philadelphia as less important than the institution they will be transferring to.

There is a lack of any clear General Education standards.

As the College’s student body becomes more part-time, the drop-out rate will increase. We are also bringing in less prepared students.

External pressures, many of which are beyond our control.

The wrong expectations are instilled.

From my experience and observation, there are several reasons why “long term student persistence” (also known as “high drop out rate”) continues to be a problem at the community college level:

Not everyone (students) at CCP really wants to be here. Some students are coming directly out of high school and are still living at home where they are given a choice by their parent(s)-either get a job go to CCP, or get out. At risk of losing free rent, some younger students choose to attend CCP to appease their parent(s) until they figure out what they really want to do. (Some of this also has to do with maturity, focus, resource/networking ability, etc.)

Some older students receiving welfare benefits now find themselves in a situation whereby their benefits will be cut off soon. They must either go to work and/or go to school (Welfare to Work Program). Motivation in the situation depends on the individual student. Some students aren’t prepared emotionally and resent the “threat” of losing benefits. Others view this situation as a wake-up call and ultimately begin to see the opportunities available to them.

Financial aid stipends allow students to attend class. However, some students abuse financial aid benefits. Again, not all CCP students really want to be here. Others don't know what's expected of them and/or how to at CCP and elsewhere.

Lack of upfront support (orientation, consistent planning and advising, mentoring opportunities, genuine willingness to go above and beyond to help the students succeed.

Students are not getting what they want in classes.

Students have less time to study due to external factors.

Developmental courses need to focus on how students learn, and help them to use their sense of self as learners with intentionality.

The economy is very weak. Students return to jobs, even low paying jobs, rather than get a degree.

An increasing need for money because of reduced "welfare" fund.

An increasing need to care for the elderly because people live longer.

External sources: economic, family, and poor preparation in public schools.

There are selective programs here at the College that have specific requirements. How many students were not accepted into selective programs and did not return to CCP?

Correct academic advising for students who apply for specific career curricula and do not get accepted on the first try.

Students are not prepared academically or socially, but are registered anyway.

Disconnected to the College.

Not prepared for the College environment.

The length of time it takes a student to move out of the 097, 098, 097 classes into their selected disciplines.

Frankly, time and life demands; these new age students are no different than their liquid, highly technical life. They expect results in the same manner as one expects information on the net; they want it in seconds as opposed to minutes.

Large numbers of CCP students are accustomed to social promotion; i.e., given a passing grade for showing up to class, when they arrive at the

College. It is very difficult to get students to “unlearn” this notion. Many students simply will not participate in their education; e.g., no homework, not taking notes, etc.

Students state that they have major problems with Registration and Financial Aid. They try over and over to work out their problems, but even the persistent ones ultimately get FRUSTRATED and often leave the College.

Expense.

People entering for the wrong reasons.

Students fail to understand course expectations.

Poor teaching, poor course structuring.

Poor pastoral care.

Poor entry education leaves students unprepared for their courses.

Poor guidance.

The courses fail to be relevant to the student.

Expense.

Poor teaching and lack of explanation of expectations, as well as the structure of the course.

Students are unprepared for the academic environment, as well as not seeking or getting academic advisement.

Attending the College for the wrong reasons.

Economic downturn in two ways:

1) Students leave in order to work more.

2) Students may enter because they have little work opportunities, and therefore are ambivalent about the value of an Associates degree. It is easier and less consequential for these students to leave.

The economy is volatile. Students take advantage of income sources (jobs, financial aid, loans, etc.) to support themselves.

Academic programming needs to reflect market needs, not faculty interests.

Who knows about the Community College of Philadelphia? Institutional pride is critical.

People give up easily on anything that is a challenge.

How many of the non-graduates left because they did not gain admission into a select curriculum?

Students taking developmental courses use and go through financial aid. The economy is a problem.

The most important reasons, in my view, all relate to external pressures on the students: work, family, and finances top the list. The students know they'd like to persist, but find themselves unable to due to these issues.

As economic realities worsen, and our society continues to minimize the importance of a liberal education, students get stuck between work and family obligations, and a lack of external support.

The home responsibilities are very pressing. Work responsibilities are also demanding.

The students have multiple out-side of school responsibilities (i.e. many variables that create a fragile balance for students). Sometimes they can find a job before completing their Associates degree.

Personal, family, employment, and financial responsibilities.

The quality of students recruited to college.

Is the schedule built to meet student needs, with night and accelerated courses?

Are programs relevant and related to emerging workforce trends?

Students fail to see the relevance of course content to current lives.

Research projects are too unfocused, and the goals of courses are not made clear enough.

Competition from other educational sources, both profit and non-profit.

Lack of faculty engagement.

More students enrolled means more support is required. Have we increased the number of advisors, financial aid professionals, and support for faculty?

Poor preparation for College courses.

Lack of high school preparedness.

The poor keep getting poorer, and can't afford it.

The number of disengaged full time faculty and a high number of adjuncts.

Lack of "college atmosphere". Some students feel that they are "not yet" in college.

## **II. What is the most important action that the College could take to improve the long term persistence of students?**

Good counseling in order to understand individual problems and provide custom made solutions.

Stress the value of a life of long term learning.

Life long learning can be started at the Community College of Philadelphia.

Learning saves lives, and promotes tolerance and understanding.

Change education attitude: High Schools won't warehouse and will promote students, but CCP will not only not warehouse students, but it will not promote them either.

Better academic advising.

Retention in my HIT105 course for the developmental sections has skyrocketed when I switched over to a part of the lab using computer assisted instruction. (Approximately six semesters have been consistently improved.

Provide co-op opportunities for students.

Boost and link counseling, advising, and career services – especially publicize 2+2 agreements. Try to get faculty and coursework connected with career and transfer exploration. More advising and mentoring seems likely to help.

Packaging of career tracks could be more pleasing, and advising within programs needs to be more careful and accurate.

Mentoring and academic sponsors.

A user friendly system in which real people answer the phone and are nice.

Actually help students with information instead of sending them to numerous locations.

Provide additional assistance such as daycare, transportation, wardrobe or school thrift shop, and off hour help when required.

Strengthen financial resources.

Focus on a clear “plan” for each career student and each transfer student.

In the Math Department, there have been several approaches used in teaching Math 016, 017, and 118. I suggest comparing outcomes for different pedagogical methods in order to inform our choices about pedagogical methods.

Require all students to see advisors within their majors at least twice each term and before registering for classes.  
Institute a Freshman Seminar system tied to advising.

Improve the ratio of full-time to part-time instructors. Faculty should keep office hours, etc. Faculty members need reasonable office space.

Continue to study the issue.  
Invite former students to return. Special invitation updates to them.

Provide an instructor with incentives to promote student interaction in class (group work) since community is important for retention and most students don't join organizations.

Ensure wrong expectations are not instilled.

Continue to offer counseling for those who want it.  
Continue to offer tutoring.  
Offer mentoring-type programs.

Strong learner support coming out of individualized goal plans and frequent evaluation of the plan.  
Perhaps some online mechanism to direct student to planning questions.

Use of effective developmental courses.  
Closer connection between academic advisement and faculty teaching.

More financial aid.

Increased help to decide upon a career during a new student's first and second semester.

Help students plan-help them have a realistic plan for their education.

An internal program to work with the students who fall between the cracks.

Train more academic advisors to work with students applying for selective programs.

Address academic advising.

Stop enrolling under-prepared students who have little chance of success. More variety in the types of programs and degrees offered. (E.g. technical fields.)

Prepare with counseling goals.

Address this problem at the high school level. Identify students, test them earlier, and get them tutor help, or address Philadelphia school district with these issues.

One suggestion would be to further cement the learning modules, i.e., a module could be effectively applied to enhance one's life position, ultimately more modules experience, more advantage to the ultimate goal of an identifiable outcome.

Strengthen academic advising units; the students that fail to proceed.

Dramatic improvement in Registration and Financial Aid. These need to be student focused. Hopefully now the Banner etc. computer systems will aid in this.

Use of a variety of teaching mediums and strategies which are student centered and dictated.

Make students aware early on of what is required.

Keep the course up-to-date and relevant with the use of worthwhile examples to which students can relate to while broadening their scope of experience globally, nationally, and regionally.

Use a variety of assignment procedures and don't weight things too heavily on one assignment.

Make the course interesting, no ivory tower teaching, be approachable and flexible.

Structure lessons so they are able to take on board all ability levels.

Integration of disciplines.

Students learning should require regular testing using a variety of assessments, not only multiple choice.

A variety of teaching methods to allow all students the ability to do well. Instructors should be approachable, not threatening and involve students in life skills activities.

Utilize relevant activities that can be related to real world issues.

Rather than faculty development, small group sessions once every two months related to teaching training workshops which are mandatory for all (even tenured professors). The purpose of these sessions would be to see what is new in the field, new to teaching, etc.

Make classes more standardized so students don't "teacher shop".

Make students "excited" about a career and show them the path to attain it.

More problem-based learning techniques used in classrooms.

Integration with different disciplines.

Make students want to be engaged.

Advising, both academic (formal) and career oriented. Perhaps a mechanism whereby failing students (more than one course per semester) are counseled to discuss alternative strategies for their persistence.

Give students and workforce partners what they need. Be proactive and reactive. The current process for change to meet market needs is cumbersome.

Someone or some group should be responsible for capturing students as they receive a denial letter, but before they leave.

Why are they not given an immediate academic advisor?

More flexible programs are necessary.

More online courses to meet schedules of students who can't be on campus.

More engagement of students.

Of course the most important responses would be to diminish financial pressure on the student with better child care options, increased financial aid, or lower fees/tuition. I know how difficult it is to address these concerns, but nevertheless that's where the answer lies. (For example, California in budget crisis charges \$18/unit at community colleges.

To improve the long-term persistence of students, instructors must refer students to advisors, counselors, etc.

Faculty and student interaction in which students interact with faculty outside of class.

Students' first engagement in the College is often at financial aid and registration. Long lines, etc., can be discouraging.

Better pre-counseling.

Increase support in setting academic goals.

Outreach programs that coordinate financial-aid, academic advising, and course availability should be instituted.

Increase the faculty participation in the institution with our students.

Honest assessment of the student's likely success based on their entrance placement and current College statistics, which can then amplify advising and counseling.

More full time faculty, more support for outside class activities by the full time faculty.

Faculty mentors (not to replace counselors) for every second semester and up student.

Encourage students who transfer early to apply for transfer credit and get a degree.

Reduce the number of unqualified students in college level courses.

### III. What is a reasonable graduation rate goal for new full-time credit students? Why?

3 years.

50%

Benchmark other schools like us. A speaker at in-service last year recognized excellence at his school.

Possibly 20% over 5 years? Relate to rates at other Community Colleges. Also, tie to graduation rate for public (4 years) but expect less because of open admission and lower economic levels.

33% in 5 years. It is something to work hard at.

50% given outside constraint of our students.

At least 20%. To exclude “unsuccessful rate of failure to persist.” This goal is strategically attached to a national climate of education for life time learning with the necessary financial and personal commitment.

The measurable outcome for transfer students should be 85-90%. Career students should be 40-60%, because a job may be a higher priority than a degree.

100% should be the goal, but I think 70% is a more realistic one.

Our current rate is low. While I wouldn't give a goal, I suggest we think in terms of a percentage improvement over each year.

I believe that setting a goal using external or arbitrary criteria is a mistake. The best measure of success vis a vis graduation rate would be a comparison of entering students' goals versus their accomplishments. That is, comprehensive longitudinal surveys of student goals upon entering followed by interim and exit surveys should be conducted. They should include all possible reasons students enter the College. (non-matrices, matriculations, few courses, career programs, certifications, intention to graduate, and intention to transfer before graduation.

I don't know. It depends on the seriousness of students and the level of societal support in the form of money.

[100% - (employment responsibilities + family responsibilities + other financial considerations + illness)]  
= 100% - (27.9 + 25.9 + 20.8 + 12.2)

$$= (100 - 86.8) = 13.2\%$$

About 60%.

At least above half of CCP's population should be graduation. However, due to many external problems, this may not be possible.

Open enrollment will always allow every person the chance to attend CCP. But again, not every student is goal-oriented and/or doesn't want to be here completely.

The rate for those who have graduation from this institution as their goal should be 90 to 100%. Because it is something they want for themselves, and isn't just what we want, it should be high.

It depends on the level of preparation that they enter with. Three years might not be unreasonable, given the right entry preparation/skills and a clean delineation of goals...kind of an IEP for each student.

20% graduation rate! Why? 2 out of 10 of my English 101 students get an "A" or "B". This is a critical thinking class. Students who get these grades should be able to graduate.

20% within 5 years.

75%

10%. Transfer and other goals (besides matriculation from this institution) are also important.

80%

30% looking at why students say they didn't graduate and look at things we have control over such as, academic problems, financial concerns, location of courses, faculty cooperation.

I think it is important to get some solid numbers on the now full time credit students that actually have a CCP degree/certificate or a goal. From this number, 80% is reasonable, considering our students' backgrounds/preparation.

80%

80%

First, perhaps we should distinguish those students whose success is not measured by graduation. Then, of the remaining students (for whom success is measured by graduation), 70 to 80% should graduate.

Identify the program: degree or certificate.  
The goal should be 100% with an x value of time to completion.  
Students “persist” as long as they have funds to do it.  
How do we manage student expectations?

What we’re doing now is what we are likely to continue doing until the students are under less financial pressure. So, if nothing changes, our rate now will continue. With positive economic changes, the rate would increase.

I think a reasonable graduation rate goal should be 3-4 years in order to have students complete prerequisites satisfactorily.

How long a time period is the graduation rate based on?  
3 years, 4 years would increase the outcome measure.  
If based on 3 years...50%

In five years, the rate should be 50%.

Strive for 100% graduation.

The college receives students that have to have improved study skills.

10-15% because our service to students is varied and graduation is only one of a number of these services.

Need more information...what happens to those who haven’t graduated?  
Do they ever graduate?

Are we only looking at full-time credit students?

Is the current graduation rate (11%) based on full-time and credit students?

For full-time credit students...50%

Increase by 3-5%.

70%, because there will always be students who just want to take a few courses.