

# **Student Retention Plan**

Increasing the retention of our students is the priority for the Tennessee College of Applied Technology Upper Cumberland (TCAT Upper Cumberland). The importance of our focus here cannot be overstated – delays in student progress negatively impact a student’s likelihood of graduation, the cost and affordability of a college degree, the quality of a student’s overall educational experience, and a college’s reputation.

The College’s retention rate hovers at 80% and has remained essentially unchanged over the last three years. As we work together to maintain and improve this rate, a coordinated, sustained, comprehensive and strategic approach is necessary. This student retention action plan provides such an approach and is intended to serve as a guide document for the college as we seek to realize measurable progress in the next three years.

The Student Retention Action Plan identifies retention action steps, responsible parties, timelines and outcomes.

Increased student retention is a priority for TCAT Upper Cumberland. Working together, we have every confidence we can realize improvements in this important indicator for student success and satisfaction.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The quality of a college’s educational experience is measured in part by undergraduate student retention and graduation rates. As TCAT Upper Cumberland continues to “foster quality and academic excellence by improving the whole student experience”, collaboration across the institution will be necessary to advance our goals in these areas.

Frequently when we talk about why students persist at an institution, we look to the 10 known factors that impact student’s retention. The factors are broken down into two categories: student characteristics and institutional experiences.

**STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS:** Academic prep, Residency, Motivation/Grit, Financial and External (family, behavioral) which are components of the workers characteristics curriculum.

**INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES:** Level and quality of engagement, Integration (academic, co-curricular and social) Academic challenge and supportive campus environment.

Fundamentally, a student bases their decision to stay or leave on a complex set of factors comprised of unique costs and benefits. From an institutional point of view, if we are to be strategic, we must identify factors that are shared by many students and over which our institutional activity can have influence. Then, we must develop or improve upon systems to exert that influence.

Some of the factors outlined above are unchangeable and/or determined before a student arrives. As an institution, we may act through our recruitment and selection processes to determine the

makeup of pre-college factors and how they affect entering students. We can also know how pre-college factors affect a student's success by providing interventions designed to augment or lessen those factors.

Undoubtedly, the overall on-campus experience is influenced by the choices and functioning of the student within the environment. It is important for us to gather information about the nature and quality of students' experiences and to review and alter campus systems that we know to be critical to students' satisfaction as well as those that are known to cause difficulties. Ultimately, all the factors, which encompass a students' academic, social and cultural integration in the college environment, serve as a key determinant in their overall rate of retention.

## MISSION

Tennessee College of Applied Technology Upper Cumberland serves as a premier supplier of workforce development throughout the state of Tennessee. The college fulfills the mission by:

- Providing competency-based training through superior quality, traditional and distance learning instruction methods that quality completes for employment and job advancement.
- Contributing to the economic and community development of the communities served by training and retraining employed workers
- Ensuring that programs and services are economical and accessible to all residents of Tennessee; and
- Building relationships of trust with community, business and industry leaders to supply highly skilled workers in areas of need

## PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the programs offered by the Tennessee College of Applied Technology are to:

- Give students the opportunity to acquire marketable skills for entry into the labor market or upgrade present skills and knowledge of persons already employed.
- Incorporate appropriate work habits and attitudes into the occupational program.
- Meet the present and anticipated needs of the business and industrial communities.
- Permit students to begin on an individual level. Pave and progress will be measured against the curriculum's customary hours and students will exit when specified competencies are met. Instructional methods are individualized, and competency based.

## RETENTION AND GRADUATION GOALS

The TCAT Upper Cumberland goal is not only to maintain students but for them to succeed and complete a program. The TCAT Upper Cumberland plan is to maintain and improve the retention rate. TCAT Upper Cumberland has met or exceeded the goals set by TBR for the last three years.

## STUDENT RETENTION ACTION PLAN

**Access:** To fulfill its mission of service and outreach to all Tennesseans, the Tennessee Board of Regents System (TBR) strives to increase the number and diversity of students it serves. The TBR system will broaden opportunities for those who wish to develop their professional skills, enrich their lives and engage in the workforce of the future. It will engage those who have historically underrepresented and underserved in their pursuit of post-secondary credentials at all levels. The TBR system will seek to ensure that every prospective student has the opportunity to enroll in its community colleges or colleges of applied technology. To meet the capacity requirements of the growing number of award-seeking students, TBR institutions will optimize gateways to higher learning through the effective use of technology, the promotion of learning partnerships within TBR and across the state, and the development of campus sites.

**Student Success:** Increasing the number of citizens with diplomas and certificates, and graduates with professional qualifications is a critical focus area for the TBR system and the state. Fostering student persistence to the completion enhances the growth of existing businesses, the ability to attract high-paying industries, the enrichment of strong communities and the future quality of life for each student. The TBR system will structure credential and diploma programs so that students may successfully graduate in a timely and cost-effective manner. TBR will build and nurture partnerships with Tennessee secondary schools to enhance student preparedness and early college credit opportunities. The TBR system will focus on student persistence through intrusive personal advisement and technology-based architected choice systems that lead to an experience of community and inclusion. Secondary and post-secondary students will be provided with guided research and real-world learning opportunities (co-op, internship and clinical experiences). By aligning degree pathways within and between TBR institutions as well as awarding credit for life experience, the time to degree will be accelerated for all learners, especially returning students and those seeking advanced degrees. To further foster student success, the TBR system will explore, develop and apply new technologies and technology-based delivery methods to enhance teaching, learning, research, service and student achievement.

**Quality:** To achieve excellence in all areas of our collective mission, the TBR system must provide high quality academic programs, faculty, services and facilities at all levels. The TBR system will sustain academic rigor and be committed to continuous quality improvement processes to help students acquire and retain the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to become creative employees, dynamic leaders, and conscientious citizens. Recognizing the quality expectations of a global marketplace and society, TBR system institutions, their faculty and their students will cultivate forward-looking research, explore creative expression in the art and engage in public service activities that aspire to world-class standards. The quality of academic programs will be measured by student performance and assessments as well as accreditation and formal review procedures. Quality assurance will be sustained through ongoing professional growth opportunities, integrated institutional effectiveness activities, and regular satisfaction responses from TBR graduates and employers. Together these processes will promote initiatives for continuous quality improvement of learning objectives, teaching and assessment of student achievement.

Resourcefulness and Efficiency: The TBR system seeks to achieve its mission through innovation and judicious use of resources. The Tennessee state government has placed higher education in the spotlight through the Complete College Tennessee Act, the TN Promise Act, TN Reconnect and the governor's drive to 55 agenda. The TBR system seeks to elevate the priority of higher education so that there will be full support of the funding formula and increases in state appropriations. TBR institutions will seek to identify alternate revenue enhancements and efficiently use their resources in order to sustain quality and provide access for a growing number of students. The TBR system and its institutions are committed to continuously identifying additional financial resources through alumni giving, endowments, foundations, and private fund-raising. Other external sources such as federal, state and local governments plus business and community partnerships will also be targeted to provide further financial support for operations, research, equipment and construction. Priority strategies such as the community college statewide marketing effort, the community college business process model, the TCAT capacity project and the system wide common data repository initiative all promote cost effectiveness and proficiency. As such the TBR system is dedicated to improving operational efficiencies such as those which are key elements of its completion initiative.

## RETENTION GOALS

Retention goals will be facilitated through administration, faculty, staff and student engagement. Each will be asked to provide their opinion of how the following factors and improve student completion and ultimately placement in their field of study.

### I. Academics via Academic Counseling

#### II. Personal

a. Personal advisement

b. Attendance tracking

#### III. Programmatic

a. Real world learning experiences

b. Aligning degree pathways within and between TBR institutions

c. Awarding credit for life experience

d. Quality of Faculty

e. Quality academic programs

f. Programmatic accreditations

#### IV. Services

a. Quality of facilities

b. Extracurricular opportunities for students

## EVALUATION

Evaluation of the retention goals and their corresponding strategies will be evaluated annually and shared with faculty and staff in a meeting to review and discuss the level of success of the strategies, which will be revised as needed to increase student credential attainment.