



The Career College Information Source

# Student Success is 10 STEPS Away!

*By John King, Ed.D., Independent Education Consultant*

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In today's challenging educational environment when new students are hard to find, and outcomes are the measure of an institution's success, colleges today are challenged like never before to improve student outcomes. Rising college costs and student debt call into question not only the value of a college education in financial terms but also the amount of time a student spends completing their education. Students and other stakeholders are looking for a cheaper, faster way to get the education necessary to secure gainful employment and a rewarding career.

For as long as I have been in education (nearly 30 years) post-secondary education has been looking for the magic formula to ensure that students successfully complete their education, graduate and go on to a rewarding career in the field of their choice. The reality is that there is no magic formula ... that only a comprehensive coordinated program of academic and student services and programs will ensure that a student who starts, will stay and complete their education. We have developed a 10 STEP (Student Tactical Education Program) that has proven successful at two multi-campus post-secondary educational organizations in improving student retention, graduation and satisfaction rates. The most recent, a twenty-two-campus group, reached double-digit

improvement in student retention within two cohort starts. All but one campus showed some improvement in retention of new students with the greatest improvement at over 40 percent. The program produced a nearly 20 percent year over year

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improvement in student retention across all students. A part of the program focused on reducing the number of post enrollment cancellations is also showing positive results.

**The 10 STEPs are as follows:**

**1. Observation, analysis & planning** – what can you observe and what does your data tell you about your students' performance that will help you develop a plan to improve student outcomes? When you begin to take a close look at your data and your operations, you will find some key areas that you can begin to focus on. For example, when we looked at

our client’s data we saw that the majority of their student drops occurred in the first three terms. This gave us a timeframe to focus most of our efforts on. We also found out that drops occurred in a number of foundational classes which caused us to take a look at the instructor’s teaching those classes and the curriculum that was being delivered. One of the things that became clear as we evaluated these classes was that a portion of the curriculum in one of the classes was too challenging for new students and would be more effectively delivered if it was moved to a later point in the curriculum when they had mastered more of a basic foundation for the material. Classroom observations showed instructional inconsistencies within the same courses based on the

assigned instructor indicating a need for faculty development of basic instructional techniques was in order, especially for new instructors.

**2. Pre-start program** – How do you prepare students for learning before starting school and ensure that they actually do follow through and start? Our analysis and observations also showed us that an area where we could make a substantial improvement in the overall health and growth of the institution was in the area of cancellations of potential students after they have enrolled. We knew that a prospective student has a strong level of commitment to their education when they decided to enroll but somehow between the time they signed an enrollment agreement and were to begin classes they changed their mind. We decided to



**DR. JOHN KING** is a seasoned professional dedicated to providing strategic services for organizations seeking improved operational effectiveness and growth through change or strategic direction. Dr. King can be best described as an educator, entrepreneur, futurist, innovator,

marketer, strategist and leader. John King is an independent strategic consultant based in Naples, Florida. Throughout his career, John has been focused on bring innovation and forward thinking to the organizations and institutions with which he has been associated, most recently as Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer at Lincoln Educational Services. In addition to serving as SVP and Chief Academic Officer of Lincoln Educational Services Inc., he has served as Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Career Education Corporation, Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs at Brown College in Minnesota, and Dean of Business & General Education at St. Paul Community & Technical College. John has also been both a full-time and adjunct instructor at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Prior to entering education in 1988, John worked in Marketing and Communications with such firms as Campbell-Mithun Advertising in Minneapolis, Tec Trans International Inc. in Minneapolis and Allied Stores Marketing

Corporation in New York. John also operated his own consulting firm for ten years and was a partner in The Creative Edge and Bijou, commercial and corporate video production companies.

Dr. King has served as chair or trustee for various colleges including Lincoln College of New England, Lincoln College of Technology – Columbia, MD, and McIntosh College in New Hampshire. John has also served on the Dakota County (Minnesota) Private Industry Council, the Eagan, Minnesota Economic Development Commission, the Small Business Management Program Advisory Committee of Dakota County Technical and Community College, the Employee Assistance Program Advisory Board of Family Service of Greater Saint Paul, and the Small Business Publicity Committee of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. John was also on the Board of Directors of the Twin Cities Marathon.

In 2010 Dr. King was featured in the cover story “Who Influenced Education This Year” in Career College Central Magazine.

John earned a BA in Economics at St. Bernard College, a Masters in Education from the University of Minnesota and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of St. Thomas.

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create a series of short online lessons that we would start the student in as soon as they enrolled, serving the dual purpose of letting them start school immediately and providing them with some lessons and skills helping them be better prepared when actual classes began. This also provided campus staff with a reason to follow up with conversations about their progress and learnings from the lessons. Topics included how to be a successful student, time management, student skills, goal setting, etc.

**3. New student at-risk inventory** – How can you secure information from prospective students before they start school to identify potential academic and life issues that can cause the student to stop or drop out? One thing that we know from experience is that life challenges and personal problems follow new students to school. A well designed new student at-risk inventory delivered before the student begins school provided campus staff with an opportunity to provide the new student with assistance in addressing and solving those problems and challenges before they become an impediment to the student persisting in school.

**4. New student orientation** – How do you get students started on the right foot on the second most important day of their educational career (graduation being the most important) and ensure that they understand their responsibilities as a student? Getting students started off right can be critical to their success. Once a student falls behind in school it is very difficult to catch up. Orientation is critical in setting the right tone and framework for the student so that they begin with the right mindset on day one. It is fair to say that most students would rather go right to work and skip school. They know, however, that an education is necessary for them to get the job in

the career they desire. Orientation is an opportunity to impress on the new student that their first day of school is no different than their first day on the job. The expectations that the employer will have is no different than those of the school. The skills, habits, and behaviors they develop in school will transfer directly to the job, and their success and competitiveness in realizing that job will be in direct proportion to their performance in school.

**5. Early student engagement** – How do you keep the student motivated and committed to their educational objectives and school work throughout their education, especially during those critical first few terms when hardship or unexpected challenges threaten their persistence in school?

How do you ensure that students develop and document the professional and academic skills that employers demand and education requires and is often not in the official curriculum? This may be one of the most important aspects of keeping a student engaged and active in school. Virtually every student will have some problem or challenge arise during their time in school. Studies have shown that the overriding reason why students leave school is that they feel that the institution does not care about them. Post-secondary education is a new experience for many of our students, and they have not been very successful in a traditional education environment. They do not know how to successfully navigate in school and require lots of assistance. Establishing an early relationship with these students and letting them know that there is an individual or individuals assigned to

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assist them in this journey is critical. Having a well-known and trusted champion and ally can often be the difference between a student dropping out or staying in school.

One of the things that we constantly hear from our advisory committees is that graduates are not sufficiently skilled in the soft skills or professionalism that they are looking for in new employees. Schools attempt to build soft skills and professionalism into their curriculum, however, programs are extremely tight with required technical and

general education curriculum. We created a menu of 32 short professionalism and soft skills workshops that can be delivered to students either online or in class as teacher-led or

stand-alone units. The menu can be presented to advisory committees to review and sign off on a set curriculum, and upon completion, students receive a certificate that they can add to their portfolio along with their diploma.

**6. Faculty development & engagement program** – How do you ensure that your faculty, especially new faculty, possess the instructional know-how and skills to engage students and lead them to academic success? In career education, we hire instructors primarily because they are great practitioners of their particular trade or subject area. We hope that we can make them into great educators. It is critical that instructors, especially new instructors receive the proper support and training to become effective teachers. We created a series of faculty development workshops designed for both the new instructor

as well as for continuing education and development of existing faculty. This is more important than ever as instructional methodology and technology continue to advance at a rapid pace. Just as we tell our students, faculty must be life-long learners as well.

**7. Curriculum review** – How do you ensure that your curriculum and instruction is current, relevant, and engaging the students in the learning process and allowing you to keep your instructional methodology in tune with the ever-changing world and workplace? The curriculum is the lifeblood of any educational institution. As with anything, the curriculum can get stale and outdated if it is not constantly reviewed and updated. The traditional “Publishers” are now calling themselves content developers as technology and advances in learning methodology are becoming more advanced and digital. In a digital world, content can be updated on a daily basis. New technologies are changing the way that work is conducted and completed by workers. The curriculum must keep up with these changes if schools are to be competitive and relevant.

**8. Campus training** – How do you facilitate campus management, staff and faculty buy-in, support and ownership of your STEP program and ensure its success? No program or initiative will be successful if employees do not understand it or know how to implement it. Training is a critical component in the success of this program. Providing employees with a rationale, explanation, directions and a sense of ownership in the initiative will go a long way in ensuring its success. Everyone needs to know their role and the how and support to get the necessary steps successfully completed.

**9. Monitor results** – How do you

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develop and monitor benchmarks to document success and/or provide data for program enhancement or modification? No program is ever perfectly executed. Monitoring results are important because it will let you know what is working and what is not. Quite often, monitoring results of a successful program can allow you to move faster than originally planned. Conversely, monitoring a sluggish program can provide you with a rationale for retraining or program modification. In any event, knowing what happens is critical for future planning.

10. Ensuring that your institution **STEPS up and makes a** difference in your students' lives by achieving total organizational commitment to the (STEP) Student Tactical Education Program! New programs or initiatives generally are not successful without total buy-in from the people expected to execute them. For that reason, selling the idea, program or initiative to the people involved is critical. When people feel that they are consulted and involved prior to implementation and are provided with

the rationale and thought process behind the initiative they are generally more supportive of the effort. What people dislike more than anything is when things are rammed down their throats without any explanation or opportunity for input. Getting the entire organization to buy into the initiative will go a long way to ensuring its success.

I know that many of the thoughts that I have expressed above are not new and many good schools do much of this automatically. My point is that there is no single thing that will lead to student success ... it is a combination of everything that you do to support students and their learning. Only a comprehensive approach will be successful. The approach I have outlined above has worked for two multi-campus organizations. Hopefully, something similar will work for you.

If you would like to learn more about this proven program and how it can work on your campus give us a call or email us.

# Career Education

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**-Fred Freedman, President/CEO,  
Pima Medical Institute**

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