

A Case Study on the Effects of Institutional Behaviors on Persistence and Degree Completion

By Don Sutherland

Patricia Bice, Interim Vice President for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management at SUNY's Purchase College presented findings related to a study of institutional behaviors on persistence and degree completion at the Middle States annual conference in Philadelphia. The study identified three primary themes: (1) internal structures, policies, and practices; (2) academic & co-curricular programs, policies, and practices; and, (3) faculty culture.

One recommendation that was made following the study concerned orientation and the first-year program. It was recommended that both should play a pivotal role, both needed redesign, both should function as an evolving and ongoing system of support, and that both should incorporate best practices based on research. The recommendation was premised on the following assumptions: (1) the programs should be holistic and comprehensive; (2) faculty are key; (3) utilization of upper class peers and staff mentors; and, (4) continued connections from summer through the start of the semester and beyond.