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Abstract

Improving retention remains a major objective of institutions of higher education. Retaining at-risk students has proved particularly challenging and increasingly important because often these students are members of underrepresented populations, such as first generation and minority students, among others. Undeclared students may be at increased risk for early departure from college because they may not have the advantages of frequent formal and informal faculty contact that declared students often have, experiences which have been identified as crucial to feelings of belonging, persistence, and retention. Using the theoretical framework developed by retention researchers as well as current literature on retention, support services, and at-risk and undeclared students, the author studied the relationship between tutoring, advising and counseling, and persistence of undeclared second-semester freshmen at a public university in the Northeast. In addition, students' perception of feeling like they belong at the university was also considered. The author found no significant difference in reported persistence, perception of support services, or sense of belonging between undeclared and declared student samples. Future research tracking actual usage of support services and persistence of undeclared students may shed further light on factors that contribute to persistence and sense of belonging of at-risk populations.