



## **Academy for Student Persistence and Completion**

### *Overview*

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Persistence and completion have emerged in the last decade as compelling concerns on many campuses. A report from the National Commission on Higher Education Attainment states that, “college completion must be our priority” as higher education professionals. With the implementation of its new Criteria, the Commission reinforces this priority by including student persistence and completion in its accrediting expectations.

In addition to the new Criteria, the Commission has initiated resources for institutions to improve through participation in the **Academy for Student Persistence and Completion**.

This academy provides a four-year sequence of activities designed to build institutional capacity to improve persistence and completion of its students. During the Academy, institutions focus on (a) effective collection of data and other information to identify student persistence and completion patterns, (b) evaluation and improvement of current persistence and completion strategies, and (c) development of new student persistence and completion strategies for specific cohorts of students.

Because institutions are at very different stages in collecting, analyzing, and using data to improve persistence and completion, the Academy offers two tracks to serve institutions that need time to evaluate and develop more effective data and information, and for institutions that have sound data systems in place and are focused on evaluating and improving current persistence and completion strategies for specific cohorts of students.

All institutions in the Academy develop appropriate plans and strategies aimed at addressing the specific issues identified. During the Academy, institutions define, track, and analyze data on student success, establish clear goals for student population groups, and connect persistence and completion efforts with assessment and improvement of student learning in the curricula and co-curricula.

The Academy is open to Commission accredited institutions in good standing and may serve several purposes.

- Institutions on the PEAQ, AQIP, Standard, and Open Pathways may join the Academy at any time.
- For institutions on the Open Pathway, the Academy may serve as the Quality Initiative if engaged at the appropriate time in the accreditation cycle.
- For institutions in AQIP, the Academy may serve as one or more action projects.
- The Academy may be used in conjunction with, as a sequel to, or as a prequel to other programs focused on student persistence and completion (for example, the Achieving the Dream or the G2C Gateway to Completion programs).

### **Academy Goals and Focus**

The Academy for Student Persistence and Completion combines a variety of interactions, in person and online, in large groups and through campus visits, to promote sharing of information and solutions among institutions and to provide tailored advice to individual institutions. Institutions will operate within a structured environment that allows for modifications that suit each institution’s needs. Throughout the activities in the Academy, institutions

receive both informal and formal analyses and commentary from assigned mentors, other institutions, and Commission staff. The initial cohorts of institutions in the Academy will help define the structure and activities that best serve the goals of future cohorts.

### **Goals for institutions participating in the Academy:**

- Define and build capacity for collecting, analyzing, and using data and other information to identify student persistence and completion patterns;
- Design and implement processes for collecting and analyzing information on student persistence and completion;
- Use information on student persistence and completion to evaluate current strategies for improvement as warranted;
- Address interrelationships among student persistence and completion, assessment of student learning, and program review efforts;
- Research and compare current and emerging practice in evaluating and improving student persistence and retention;
- Define student persistence and completion strategies that are suited to the institution, its programs, and its student populations; and
- Enhance organizational capacity and faculty and staff expertise in achieving student learning and success goals.

Institutions will focus on three areas during the Academy:

1. **Focus on Collecting and Analyzing Data.** This focus is on the collection and analysis of those data that address such things as student intent, remedial and other first-year student status information, demographics, “stop-out” versus drop-out trends, institutional culture, student engagement, and curriculum. Institutions will be guided through the development of these data sets and helped to correlate this information with continuing enrollment or transfer data to determine what specific institutional factors need to be addressed to improve persistence and completion.
2. **Focus on Strategy Development and Testing.** Having formulated questions based on thorough data analysis, institutions will develop strategies to respond to them. As in the data development and analysis phase, this is a closely mentored process designed to develop persistence and completion strategies appropriate to each institution.
3. **Focus on Improving Persistence and Completion.** Institutions will examine the relationships among student persistence and completion, academic program quality, and student learning; and build processes for and commitment to improved student persistence and completion.

### **Academy Program Structure and Process**

**Two Academy Tracks to Serve Different Institutional Needs.** Because institutions are at very different stages in collecting, analyzing, and using data to improve persistence and completion, the Academy offers two tracks: Track A: Data Development and Analysis and Track B: Data Analysis and Strategy Refinement. Both tracks engage institutions deeply in data analysis and strategy development and implementation. However, Track A serves those institutions that need to develop more articulated data sets and will offer more time for guidance in developing those data before analyzing and using the information to design and implement strategies, while Track B serves those institutions that already have enough data in place to do granular analysis, strategy design, and

implementation early in the Academy, so as to allow three full years to test, evaluate, and refine approaches for specific student groups.

### Academy Admission and Launch

1. **Application and Admission.** The institution completes the application form, identifying its primary concerns related to persistence and completion, describing the data that led to those concerns, proposing the Academy track that best fits its needs (Track A or Track B), and committing to following the Academy's four-year process. Commission staff and Academy mentors review the application, recommend acceptance or further consideration, and if acceptance, provide dates for the next Information and Planning Workshop, the first required activity in the Academy. The institution will receive the recommendation within sixty (60) days of application. The institution will also receive initial comments from the reviewers on the institution's proposed track. The preliminary activities described below are designed to help the institution finalize its track selection.
2. **Information and Planning Workshop.** All institutions accepted into the Academy must attend an Information and Planning workshop in the Chicago area. Institutions should send a team of two or three people; attendees should include a senior administrator and a person responsible for persistence and completion data. The workshop, to be held two to three months before the Academy launch, will provide participants with detailed information about the Academy and the commitment it involves; offer frank discussions on the data sets that the institution has and/or may need to develop; and clarify the similarities and differences between the two tracks. In addition, the workshop offers time for teams to hear advice on building the on-campus group that will coordinate institutional efforts and attend the Academy Roundtable.
3. **Mentor-Facilitated Data Review.** Following the Information and Planning Workshop, the institution hosts a mentor-facilitated data review, an inventory that looks frankly and carefully at the institution's current data sets on persistence and completion, at the degree to which data are specific enough to be analyzed meaningfully, and at the structures in place to assure campus-wide engagement in data analysis and planning. This review may occur via webinar, phone conference, or on-campus visit. At the end of the review, the mentor provides the institution with feedback on the state of the institution's data on persistence and completion, suggests what data sets should be developed in time for the **Academy Roundtable**, and makes a final recommendation about the track the institution should choose.
4. **Confirmation of Academy Track and Launch.** Following the data review, the institution chooses its track. The choice of track should be based on the data-readiness of the institution and will determine the date the institution attends the Academy Roundtable—either at the beginning of the first year (Track B) or six months into the first year (Track A). It is essential that institutions are prepared to engage with their data when they attend the Roundtable.
5. **Confirmation of Academy Cohort.** In accepting institutions into the Academy, the Commission aligns them with a group of like institutions. These groups are called Academy cohorts. Institutions remain with their cohort for the four-year period.

### Track A. Data Development and Analysis (for institutions that do not yet have developed data sets)

1. **Year 1: Data Development.** With the assistance of a mentor, the institution develops data sets consistent with the recommendations of the **mentor-facilitated data review**. This interaction should take six months, during which meaningful data sets will be developed that provide specific insights into the institution's persistence and completion issues. Once the mentor and the institution determine that the institution has sufficient data to draw conclusions about its needs, the institution attends the Academy Roundtable.
2. **Years 2-4.** As soon as the institution has developed an adequate data set, the activities in this track pattern those of Track B described below. The institution may complete the Academy program in four years or may opt for a fifth year.

**Track B. Data Analysis and Strategy Refinement** (for institutions that have at least some data sets)

1. **Beginning of Year 1: Academy Roundtable.** Approximately one month after the data review, the institution in Track B attends the required Academy Roundtable. The Roundtable provides strategies for data analysis, using the institution's own data, as well as initial assistance in planning activities and processes that emerge from the analysis of those data. The Roundtable thus helps the institution to determine appropriate, data-driven questions about persistence and completion as well as to sketch out plans for dealing with those questions.
2. **Years 1-4: Collaboration Network and Mentor Responses.** Once an institution completes the Roundtable, it posts a summary of its plans and strategies on the Collaboration Network. Each posting by an institution receives a Mentor Response from the mentor assigned to the institution, who will continue to provide responses on subsequent postings. Responses address both data analysis and activity planning. The institution will continue to post and receive responses and coaching every six months throughout its Academy tenure. In addition, the institution can search the network directory to review strategies of other Academy members to comment on their work and make connections.
3. **Year 3: Mid-point Roundtable.** Once the institution has completed two years of Academy work it sends a team to the required Mid-Point Roundtable, a multi-day event for Academy members to share their progress, seek advice from one another, and receive in-person mentoring in planning the next stages of their work. It also allows institutions in the same cohort to meet with each other and discuss strategies.
4. **Year 3-4: On-Campus Consultation.** A mentor who knows the institution's work visits the institution to review progress and make suggestions for final efforts to complete the data-driven strategies the institution has undertaken. The mentor provides a candid, concise consultation describing the institution's progress, accompanied by recommendations for future progress. (Mentoring on the Collaboration Network continues.)
5. **Year 4: Impact Report and Cohort Results Forum.** At the end of Year 4, the institution writes a brief Impact Report and sends a team to the multi-day Cohort Results Forum to share accomplishments and findings, compare good practices and benchmarks, and define post-Academy strategies to sustain student persistence and completion efforts. Institutions that began the Academy together attend the same Cohort Results Forum. During this event, Academy mentors and Commission staff will provide consultation and critique.
6. **Year 4: Academy Completion.** Shortly after completing the Academy the institution will receive a brief **Results Response** from its mentors. This report validates genuine effort and successful participation in the Academy, and if requested, provides consultation for continued success.

**Optional Activities** (additional fees may apply)

- **Interim Services and Activities (Years 1-4).** As an Academy member, the institution may choose to participate in optional programs, services, and activities to support its work and the ongoing development of those leading the initiative. Examples include on-campus consultation and facilitation, good practice and mentoring webinars, strategy workshops, coordinated visits to good practice campuses, and research or data strategy forums. Also, the institution may opt to attend more than one Roundtable or Results Forum.
- **Ongoing Involvement.** The institutions may request to extend Academy participation to a fifth year. In addition, the institution may continue to maintain access to the Collaboration Network and attend Mid-Point Roundtables and Annual Conference Poster Fairs and Share Fairs. If space is available, an institution may apply to rejoin the Academy for another four-year experience.

<b>Four-Year Academy Experience and Pricing</b>	
<p><b>YEAR ONE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Review (institution pays mentor travel costs if review occurs on-campus)</li> <li>• Information and Planning Workshop (Price includes registration for a three-person team from the institution, but additional team members may be added at additional fee; institution pays own travel expenses)</li> <li>• Data Mentoring as needed</li> <li>• Academy Roundtable (Price includes registration for a five-person team from the institution, but additional team members may be added at additional fee; institution pays own travel expenses)</li> <li>• Collaboration Network for sharing ideas, reviewing cohort work, linking to resources</li> <li>• Optional: Topical webinars, online mentoring and data review in Network</li> </ul>	\$8,500*
<p><b>YEAR TWO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentor Consultation and Strategy Critique two times annually (online)</li> <li>• Collaboration Network for sharing ideas</li> <li>• Optional: Topical webinars, online mentoring and data review in Network</li> </ul>	\$6,000
<p><b>YEAR THREE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-Point Academy Roundtable (occurs in Year 3; price includes registration for a five-person team from the institution, but additional team members may be added at additional fee; institution pays own travel expenses)</li> <li>• Mentor Consultation and Strategy Critique two times annually (online)</li> <li>• Collaboration Network for sharing ideas, reviewing cohort work, linking to resources</li> <li>• Campus Consultation to provide commentary on progress (may occur in Year 4)</li> <li>• Optional: Topical webinars, online mentoring and data review in Network</li> </ul>	\$6,000
<p><b>YEAR FOUR:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohort Results Forum (Price includes registration for a five-person team from the institution, but additional team members may be added at additional fee; institution pays own travel expenses)</li> <li>• Impact Report</li> <li>• Collaboration Network for sharing ideas</li> <li>• Optional: Topical webinars, online mentoring and data review in Network</li> </ul>	\$6,000
<p><b>OPTIONAL PROGRAMS - SEPARATE FEES APPLY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Conference programming for Academy members</li> <li>• Participation in second Mid-Point Roundtable or Cohort Results Forum</li> <li>• Continued access to Collaboration Network and participation in events post-Academy</li> <li>• Additional consultation on campus</li> <li>• Faculty and staff visits to other institutions</li> <li>• Additional consultation days added to Academy events</li> <li>• Other programs and services not identified above</li> </ul>	Fees set annually

\*Institutions must pay the first year fee prior to attending the Information and Planning Workshop.

**Flowchart of Activities in Academy for Student Persistence and Completion**

The Academy offers institutions a Commission-facilitated program focused on evaluating and improving student persistence and completion. The Academy provides a four-year sequence of activities designed to help an institution sort through the unique information about the non-completion of its students and develop appropriate plans and strategies aimed at addressing the specific issues identified. During the Academy, institutions define, track, and analyze data on student success, establish clear goals for student population groups, and connect persistence and completion efforts with assessment and improvement of student learning in the curricula and co-curricula.

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1. Institutions on the PEAQ, AQIP, Standard, and Open Pathways may join the Academy at any time.
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