

# **Student Retention and Communication Barriers at Faith-Based Universities**

Retention is a major focus in higher education, especially within private, faith-based universities like Southern Adventist University. This paper explores key factors influencing student retention and why students may not communicate or follow through with student support services. Drawing on current research, the paper outlines both quantitative data and qualitative insights, emphasizing barriers such as stigma, lack of awareness, mental health concerns, and cultural disconnects. Additionally, the paper presents recommended strategies and theoretical models that can help institutions improve student engagement and retention.

the Student retention remains a complex challenge for many faith-based universities. Although institutions like Southern Adventist University report high retention rates (College Factual, 2023), there is still a portion of the student body that disengages or fails to use available resources. Retention rates for private, faith-based universities average around 72% (Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, 2024). Southern Adventist University exceeds this with an 81% first-year retention rate (College Factual, 2023). Despite these numbers, nearly 20% of students do not continue, prompting a deeper look into the barriers they face.

Research highlights several barriers that prevent students from engaging with campus support services. Many students are unaware of available resources due to ineffective outreach (Mowreader, 2023). Some fear being judged for seeking help, while others attempt to resolve academic or personal challenges independently (Winograd & Rust, 2014). Cultural and personal factors may also lead students to mistrust institutional resources (Johnson et al., 2022). Anxiety

and depression further hinder students from seeking the help they need (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2012).

Two models guide understanding in this area. Tinto's Model of Retention emphasizes academic and social integration as keys to student persistence (Tinto, 1993). The Sense of Belonging Theory suggests that students who feel connected to their campus are more likely to succeed (Strayhorn, 2019). To improve student retention and communication with support services, universities should increase awareness through targeted outreach, normalize help-seeking behavior to reduce stigma, build trust with culturally competent staff, integrate peer mentorship and proactive advising, and prioritize mental health awareness and accessible counseling services.

Improving communication between students and support services is vital for increasing retention rates. Faith-based universities are uniquely positioned to create inclusive and supportive environments that align with their mission. By addressing barriers and implementing evidence-based strategies, institutions can better support students on their educational journeys.

## References

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