



Coventry University

Who would learn in a place like this?
Tensions, challenges and future directions for
improving student retention in the 21st Century

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Courses	Business	Research	International	News and Events	Alumni	The City	The University
							





“Coventry is an evolving and innovative university”

The University

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About the University

We are a forward-looking, modern university with a proud tradition as a provider of high quality education and a focus on applied research.

Our students benefit from state-of-the-art equipment and facilities in all academic disciplines including health, design and engineering laboratories, performing arts studios and computing centres. We have been chosen to host three national Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning which has enabled us to invest substantial sums of money in health, design and mathematics.

Our city-centre campus is continually developing and evolving, and we have plans for further investment in it over the next few years. We are a major presence in Coventry, which contributes to the city's friendly and vibrant atmosphere and also enables us to foster successful business partnerships.

Through our links with leading edge businesses and organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, our students are able to access project and placement opportunities that enhance their employability on graduation.



2010-15 Mission Statement

‘We are a dynamic global enterprising University. We work in partnership with external organisations through our research and engage our students as partners in a community of learners.’





- About me...

- Background
- Current interests
- Applied Research Fellowship



The Open
University



Session aims

- To examine the nature of student completion in HE
- To understand influences on non-completion
- To explore the competitive advantage of the 'traditional student'
<http://viscog.beckman.illinois.edu/grafs/demos/15.html>
- To discuss the role of learning spaces to encourage integration of WP students.

“A scathing report from the Commons Public Accounts Committee claimed that £800million already spent on initiatives to curb dropout rates had failed to have an impact...”

The Daily Mail March
2008

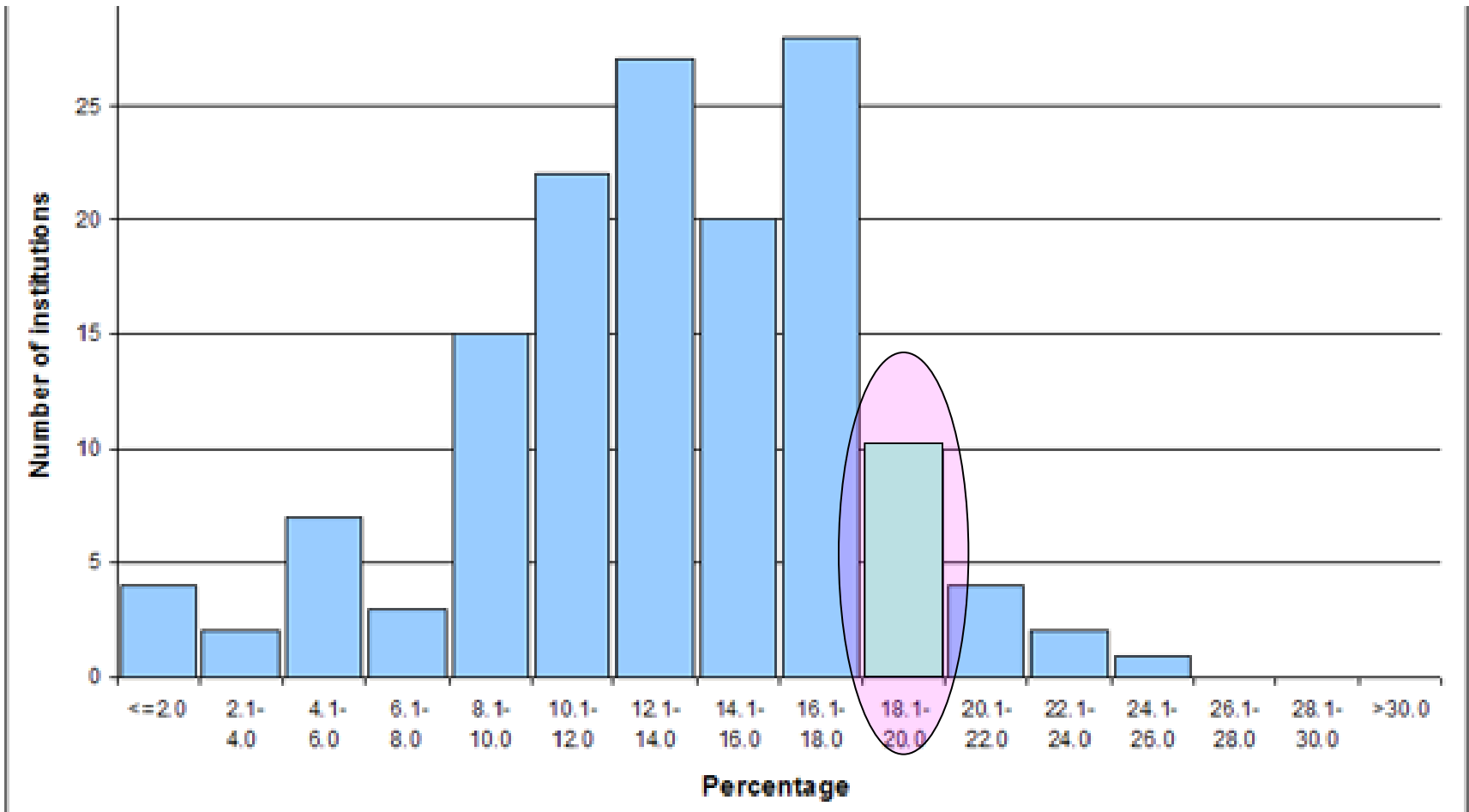
Why should we care?

- Student experience
- Reputation
- money



What is the scale of the problem?

- In the UK – HE sector approx \$503M loss of revenue
- That's 3 MacDonal'd's Happy Meals for every person in Australia



- Percentage of WP students not continuing 2006/7

Major influences on non-completion

- Teaching quality [16.6%]
- Not coping with academic demand [9.6%]
- Poor choice of programme [8.7]
- Unhappy with location and environment [7.0]
- Dissatisfied with institutional resourcing e.g. lack of contact with academic staff [6.8]
- Finance and employment issues [6.3%]
- Problems with social integration [5.9%]

Quality of the learning experience

- Those most dissatisfied were;
- Non-A level students
- Students with prior experience of HE
- Students in post-92 universities

Why students leave: Poor staff/student contact

I felt quite isolated in terms of studying. Lecturers spoke during lectures and then would leave the room, with no time for questions.

During my entire first year I never once met my personal tutor. There seemed to be no interest in students' personal needs.

I did NOT enjoy my experience what so ever, due to the lack of support from staff. I was never introduced to my personal tutor and felt like a number – not a person in a new [overwhelming] environment. Not one of my tutors spoke to me as an individual ...

So what can be done? – National recommendations

- Something can always be done
- Institutional self-scrutiny is a useful starting point [institutional research?]
- Identify top priorities; give primary attention to them

National recommendations – focus on the First Year Experience

- Dimensions of transition – from hurdlers to high jumpers
 - Social changes
 - Work/study/lifestyle balances
 - Curriculum changes
 - Assessment changes
 - Staff-student relationship changes

Remember;

- Early leaving is an institutional problem but a student solution
- People don't leave clubs they feel proud of and welcomed by
- You don't fatten a pig by weighing him

Blame the students?

- "It's a bit like trying to find young people to represent us in the 2012 Olympics who are not very good and giving the coaches more money to try to train them up"
- "growing numbers are recruiting students with poor grades, casting doubt on their aptitude for degree-level studies."
- "More than half of students at four-year colleges and at least 75 percent at two-year colleges lack the literacy to handle complex, real-life tasks such as understanding credit card offers"

» <http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/>

Blame the structure?

- Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. Prensky, 2001
- We are trying to use 19th Century institutions to prepare young people for life in the 21st Century. Yoram Harpaz, 2008
- We need to rethink our ideas about what it means to be educated. Sir Ken Robinson, 2007

A different approach...

- 6%
- 46%





The have's



- A right to be there
- Parental support
- Financial support
- Understanding of the system
- Extra-curricula enrichment
- Gap years
- Study space



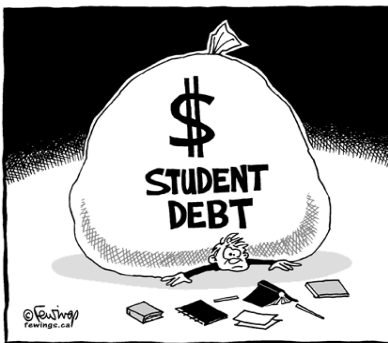
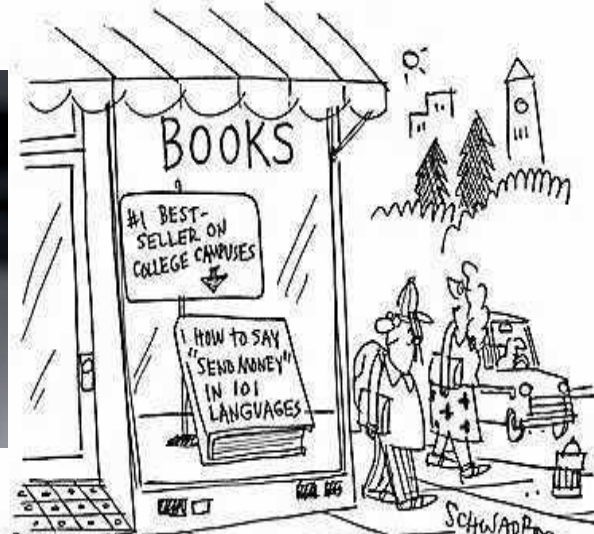


The have not's

- Financial pressure
- Family/home commitments
- Travel time
- Need to work
- Lack of support
- Peers
- Space for



"I'm not good with numbers."



How can we create a university that bridges the gap between the have's and the have not's?

- Don't pathologise the student
- Build structures around the student journey
- Create an environment outside the classroom that provides spaces for learning
- It should provide everything the 'advantaged' student receives as a 'right' – except the bed

Providing a social backdrop

- We need to offer a social backdrop to learning (Deane, 2009) rather than delineating the cognitive from the emotional learning experience.

“Students should not have to understand how the University is structured in order to access its services”

Les Watson, 2008

Student journey metaphor

- If we use the student journey metaphor to drive the organisation of HEIs it will provide a framework for evaluating the performance and highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the university at every stage of the student experience.

» Lynne Hunt, 2009

Creating a 'third place'

Third places are neither home nor work - the 'first two' places - but venues like coffee shops, bookstores and cafes in which we find less formal acquaintances.

These comprise 'the heart of a community's social vitality' where people go for good company and lively conversation"

Richard Florida - The Rise of the Creative Class

Ray Oldenberg - A Great Good Place

Christian Mikunda - Brand Lands, Hot Spots and Cools Spaces - Welcome to the 3rd Place

Pat Kane - The Play Ethic

Robert Putnam - Better Together - Restoring the American Community

Learning spaces

- “The space we provide should become a physical representation of the institution’s vision and strategy for learning – responsive, inclusive and supportive of attainment by all.”

» JISC, 2007

Principles of learning

- The structure should reflect and accommodate the principles of learning.
- If the student journey is foregrounded in our business then we are likely to improve student attainment and progression (Hunt and Peach, 2009)

Campus learning spaces

If you can **design** the **physical space**, the **social space** and the **information space** together to enhance **collaborative learning**, then that whole milieu **turns into a learning technology**. People just **love working there** and they start **learning with and from each other**.

John Seely Brown

former chief scientist, Xerox Corporation

Of course there's a lot of knowledge in Universities; the freshman bring a little in, the graduates don't take much away, so knowledge sort of accumulates.



© RMJM Coventry University Multi-Storey Car Park

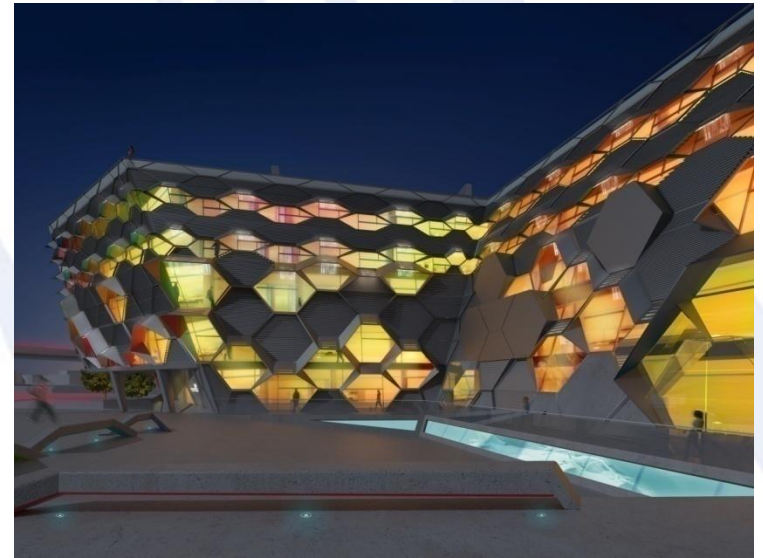
Lawrence Lowell

Discussion questions

- Do you think campus spaces have an important part to play in the student learning experience?
- What does your department do to create effective learning spaces outside the classroom?

Retention Questions for discussion

- What issue(s) do you hope to influence? With what populations?
- What is the significance of the issue(s)? How do you know?
- What strength does your campus have to bring to addressing these issues?
- What are the high impact activities on your campus? Map these against the student journey.



- “Most institutions have not yet been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gains in student persistence and graduation.” (Tinto, 2006).

Thank you
Any questions?





