EPI Opens Toronto Office
(Ottawa, ON) The Educational Policy Institute, Inc., a non-profit research firm based in Northern Virginia, announced the appointment of Mr. Alex Usher today as Vice President of Postsecondary Research and Director of EPI Canada. In his dual role with the Educational Policy Institute, Mr. Usher will provide leadership in the development of postsecondary projects, including international efforts, related to the institute’s mission of educational opportunity. In addition, he will develop and manage the Canadian office of EPI Canada in Toronto, Ontario.

Speaking at a research conference in Ottawa sponsored by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, EPI President Watson Scott Swail had this to say:

Research Focus
Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education

The Educational Policy Institute is pleased to announce a new ASHE-ERIC monograph written by EPI president Watson Scott Swail, with Kenneth Redd and Laura Perna. Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education is a key reference for stakeholders regarding the realities of and strategies for student retention, and serve as a “compass” for those involved with the complex task of improving student persistence on college and university campuses. This edition of epicenter is devoted to the monograph (see Page 3). The project was underwritten through a generous grant from the Ford Foundation. For further information, please visit www.josseybass.com or visit www.educationalpolicy.org.

EPI Participates in Prague Conference

EPI participating in an international conference on postsecondary financing and financial aid in eastern bloc countries this past June in Prague, Czech Republic. Dr. Swail, who’s participation was sponsored by the Ford Foundation, provided the international audience with an overview of the American postsecondary and financial aid system. Mr. Alex Usher, EPI’s new Vice President and Director of EPI Canada, provided a similar overview of the Canadian system. The conference, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and coordinated by the University International Comparative Higher Education, Finance, and Accessability Project at SUNY Buffalo, focused on the new reality for many eastern bloc nation’s that are opening the doors of higher education, but are having significant purse-string problems with financing a growing system. Please visit www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/inthighereducation for more information on the International Comparative project.


Dr. Swail speaks with Hossan Badrawi, a member of the Egyptian Parliament, in Prague this past June.
EPI Canada (continued)

say: “We’re very pleased with the addition of Mr. Usher. He is an extraordinarily talented individual with experience in student aid, educational opportunity, and working with provincial and federal policymakers. We are very fortunate to have someone of Mr. Usher’s stature and experience join the EPI family, and expect him to make a strong contribution to the growth and efforts of the organization.”

EPI Canada officially opened its Bloor Street office on November 1. The Canadian office will focus primarily on Canadian issues, but will also provide research support to EPI International, based in Stafford, Virginia. Because of Mr. Usher’s strong knowledge and experience in international issues, he will spearhead new research in that area.

Mr. Usher has spent the past four years serving as Director of Research and Program Development for the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation in Montreal, where he established a strong research program that provided new viewpoints about educational opportunity across Canada. In 2002, Mr. Usher co-authored the landmark Canadian publication, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada.*

Prior to his work with the Foundation, Mr. Usher served as Senior Policy Analyst for the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and as a consultant to the provincial Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the Federal Department of Human Resources Development. He also served as National Director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations.

Mr. Usher is also joined by Ms. Amy Cervenan, research associate and former staff member at the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

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Alan Wagner (SUNY Albany), Petr Matej (Conference Chair), Barry McGaw (OECD), Jorge Balan (Ford Foundation), and EPI president Dr. Watson Scott Swail at Prague conference on University Reform and Accessibility of Higher Education this past June.

www.educationalpolicy.org
It is widely understood that education has a profound impact on both the individual and society. Individuals with a bachelor’s degree earn, on average, twice that of high school graduates, and those with a professional degree earn twice what individuals with a bachelor’s earn. Thus, the demand for postsecondary education has increased greatly over the past several decades, with enrollments up tenfold since the mid 1900s to approximately 14 million.

Educational attainment levels continue to be substantially lower for African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians than for Whites and Asians. In 2000, only 11 percent of Hispanics and 17 percent of Blacks in the U.S. population age 25 and older had attained at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 28 percent of Whites and 44 percent of Asians.

A review of available data suggests that increasing the share of students of color who attain a bachelor’s degree requires attention to four critical junctures: academic preparation for college, graduation from high school, enrollment in college, and persistence in college to completion of the bachelor’s degree.

Critical Juncture 1: Academic Preparation for College

The first critical juncture on the road to a bachelor’s degree is becoming academically prepared during high school to enroll in college and persist to degree completion. Research shows that the level of academic preparation in high school is positively related to high school graduation rates, college entrance examination scores, predisposition toward college, college enrollment, representation at more selective colleges and universities, rates of transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, progress toward earning a bachelor’s degree by age 30, college persistence rates, and college completion rates. Completing a rigorous curricular program during high school appears to be a more important predictor of college persistence than test scores, particularly for African American and Hispanic students.

Critical Juncture 2: Graduation from High School

The second critical juncture on the road to a bachelor’s degree is graduating from high school. In 2000, 43 percent of Hispanics in the U.S. population age 25 and older had not completed high school, compared with 21 percent of blacks, 14 percent of Asians, and 12 percent of whites. These and other data suggest that one source of observed racial and ethnic group differences in educational attainment is lower rates of high school graduation, especially among Hispanic men and women.

Critical Juncture 3: Enrollment in College and University

Annual college enrollment rates have generally increased among high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 for blacks, Hispanics, and whites since the late 1980s. However, the share of black high school graduates enrolled in a degree-granting institution remained virtually unchanged between 1979 and 1989 but increased through the 1990s. Similarly, the shares of Hispanic high school graduates were comparable in 1979 and 1989 but higher in 1999. In contrast, the share of white high school graduates enrolled in college increased between across both decades.

At four-year colleges and universities, the representation of African Americans and Hispanics attending full time for the first time increased between 1986 and 1997, but was lower than their representation in the traditional college-age population. In addition to being less likely than whites to enroll in a four-year college, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans appear to be more likely to enroll in a two-year institution. As well, a smaller share of Hispanics than of whites and Asians enrolled in some type of post-secondary educational institution within two years of graduating from high school.

Critical Juncture 4: Persistence in College

The fourth critical juncture on the road to a bachelor’s degree is persistence in college to degree completion. Research shows that the level of academic preparation in high school is positively related to high school graduation rates, college entrance examination scores, predisposition toward college, college enrollment, representation at more selective colleges and universities, rates of transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, progress toward earning a bachelor’s degree by age 30, college persistence rates, and college completion rates. Completing a rigorous curricular program during high school appears to be a more important predictor of college persistence than test scores, particularly for African American and Hispanic students.

Critical Juncture 5: Degree Completion

The fifth and final critical juncture on the road to a bachelor’s degree is degree completion. Research shows that the level of academic preparation in high school is positively related to high school graduation rates, college entrance examination scores, predisposition toward college, college enrollment, representation at more selective colleges and universities, rates of transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, progress toward earning a bachelor’s degree by age 30, college persistence rates, and college completion rates. Completing a rigorous curricular program during high school appears to be a more important predictor of college persistence than test scores, particularly for African American and Hispanic students.
PART II. WHY STUDENTS LEAVE COLLEGE

The literature regarding minority student dropout abounds with details of why and when students leave college. Many studies and literature reviews summarize similar sources and thus supply similar conclusions. Landmark studies by Tinto (1975), Pantages and Creedon (1978), Cope and Hannah (1975), Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980), and more recently, Tierney (1992) and Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993), have shaped how researchers and practitioners view the issue of student retention and departure. In particular, Tinto’s attrition model has become a foundation for most research regarding student departure.

Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1975), based in part on Durkheim’s theory of suicide, theorizes that the social integration of students increases their institutional commitment, ultimately reducing the likelihood of student attrition. As Tinto wrote, “It is the interplay between the individual’s commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out.” Tinto’s model has been revised or enhanced by a number of researchers used important aspects of Tinto’s academic and social integration theory in the development of a psychological, rather than sociological, model, to help others “visualize how individual psychological processes can be understood in the retention process.”

A number of researchers have found shortcomings in persistence and integration models. However, the complexity of the human condition makes it difficult to definitely prove the validity of one psychological or sociological theoretical model over another.

Factors Related to Retention

There are a number of factors related to retention, and researchers have found differences, as well as similarities, between White students and students of color.

Academic Preparedness. Academic integration and preparation are primary features of many models of retention. Research shows that between 30 and 40 percent of all entering freshman are unprepared for college-level reading and writing and approximately 44 percent of all college students who complete a 2- or 4-year degree had enrolled in at least one remedial/developmental course in math, writing, or reading.

Campus Climate. While researchers agree that “institutional “fit” and campus integration are important to retaining college students to degree completion, campus climate mediates undergraduates’ academic and social experiences in college. Minority students inadequately prepared for non-academic challenges can experience culture shock. Lack of diversity in the student population, faculty, staff, and curriculum often restrict the nature and quality of minority students’ interactions within and out of the classroom, threatening their academic performance and social experiences.

Commitment to Educational Goals and the Institution. Tinto (1993) hypothesized that commitment to occupa-
tional and educational goals and commitment to the institution in which one enrolls significantly influence college performance and persistence. The stronger the goal and institutional commitment the more likely the student will graduate. Research shows that congruence between student goals and institutional mission is mediated by academic and social components, and that increased integration into academic and social campus communities causes greater institutional commitment and student persistence.

Social and Academic Integration. The process of becoming socially integrated into the fabric of the university has also been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process, and the level of social integration within a given year of study is part of a cumulative experience that continues to build throughout one’s college experience. The establishment of peer relations and the development of role models and mentors have been defined in the literature as important factors in student integration, both academically and socially.

Financial Aid. Attending college and persisting to degree completion is most often rewarded with higher annual and lifetime earnings. But for many low-income and minority students, enrollment and persistence decisions are driven by the availability of financial aid. In 1999-2000, 77 percent of financially dependent students from families with less than $20,000 in family income received some financial aid, with an average award of $6,727. In contrast, 44 percent of those from families with income of $100,000 or more received aid, with an average award of $7,838.

Low-income and minority students who receive grants generally are more likely to persist than those who receive loans. However, given the rising costs of attending college, it is unlikely that low-income students will be able to receive bachelor’s degrees without any loan aid. At the same time, the research also suggests that the shifts in aid from grants to loans and from need-based to merit-based programs adversely affects both enrollment and persistence for minority students. Reversing these shifts may be needed to increase college access and success for low-income and minority students.

PART III. A FRAMEWORK FOR RETENTION

While student persistence models remain useful in illustrating the problems and processes relating to student persistence, the relationship between college and student is lost between the simplicity and complexity of the various models. Without a clear explanation of what the model represents, it is difficult for administrators and practitioners to fully comprehend the significance of the model and how it relates to campus policy.

The Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement provides a user-friendly method for discussion and focuses on (a) the cognitive and social attributes that the student brings to campus; and (b) the institutional role in the student experience. The geometric model differs from others by placing the student at the center of the model, rather than an indifferent element to a flow chart or structural equation model.

The model also allows us to discuss the dynamics between cognitive, social, and institutional factors, all of which take place within the student. These three forces must combine to provide a solid foundation for student growth, development, and persistence. When stability is lost, students risk reducing their academic and social integration with the institution, and therefore risk dropping or stopping out. This model works to help describe the persistence process, and the delicate balance between student resources (what the student brings to campus) and institutional resources (what the institution provides for the student).

The strength in the model and the following conceptual framework is in their ability to help institutions work proactively to support student persistence and achievement. Diagnostic and supplementary knowledge of the student is a vital component of the geometric model, because without knowledge, the institution is incapable of making prudent decisions on whom to admit.

A Conceptual Framework for Student Retention

This campus-wide retention model was designed to provide administrators with a strategy and framework to build a stu-
dent retention plan that incorporates the individual needs of their students and institution. It was designed with the hope that this model will allow administrators and planners to devote more of their time to planning and management rather than to the uncovering of research to support their actions.

From an administrative perspective, the strategies introduced in the model are not prescriptive. They are alternatives and institutional practices that are consistent with both current thinking within the various communities and what we have been able to ascertain through the research literature. As well, this framework will be particularly significant in providing an understanding of the various roles that will be expected and required of administrators, faculty members, and staff members on campus if a program is to be successful.

The retention framework is classified into five components based upon an extensive review of current literature: financial aid, recruitment and admissions, academic services, student services, and curriculum and instruction. The framework components are further broken down into categories based on areas of specialization, and subsequently into specific objectives.

The research-based model is supported by a student-monitoring system. Such a system, when developed to capture data that reflects the true nature of student and faculty life, provides institutions with a snapshot of student experience in terms of academic and social development and provides knowledge that campus offices and personnel can use to generate more appropriate methods of supporting student needs.

Details of the framework are provided in the monograph.

PART IV. IMPLEMENTATION, LEADERSHIP, AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The development of any program at any university requires a multi-faceted process incorporating all campus officials, including administration, faculty, staff, and especially students. Leadership and faculty ownership are key variables in a successful retention program, and the message communicated from top management is critical to the support of the campus staff.

The issue of institution-wide change and the coordination of effort across all departments and levels are essential to real change. Change is complex, and change agents must navigate difficult waters.

Senior campus leadership is a key ingredient needed to implement retention programs. Senior leadership must play two important roles: monitoring institutional progress toward clearly stated campus retention goals; and coordinate and lead all stakeholders—students, parents, other campus administrators, faculty, and staff—toward stated goals. Unfortunately, despite the possible influence of presidents on retention efforts, most presidents do not appear to be engaged in these issues. Partly, this is due to other pressures presidents face, such as fundraising and faculty issues.

Developing and implementation a comprehensive student retention program requires a commitment from leaders, faculty, and staff. Through our discussion with some of these individuals, as well as our review of related research, we were able to come up with a short list of essential factors in establishing such a program.

A comprehensive student retention program must:
- Rely on proven research
- suit the particular needs of the campus
- be institutionalized and become a regular part of campus service involve all campus departments and all campus personnel
- take into consideration the dynamics of the change process and provide extensive and appropriate retraining of staff
- be student centered
- operate in a cost effective way, and not tied to soft monies
- have the support of a comprehensive student monitoring system that will become the foundation of all institutional research on campus and support every department
- be sensitive to student needs and to diverse populations

The development of a campus-wide retention program requires: (a) supportive leadership; (b) the willingness to evoke change on campus; and (c) a careful planning effort. If either of these essential factors is missing, the chances for success are limited. Once institutions have ensured that the climate for change exists and the support and guidance of campus leadership is present, the following stages may provide guidance during the planning and development of the retention effort.

Coming soon in epicenter

- Access and affordability in the US and Canada.
- *tution policy and student enrollment in five nations.
- The impact of rising college costs
- Latinos and the pathway to postsecondary education.
- Graduation rates in US colleges and universities.

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FINAL THOUGHTS

This report presents an enormous amount of information, including background information and data analysis, theoretical underpinnings of student retention and persistence, and the illustration of concrete resources and activities for consideration and implementation of retention programs on college campuses. We close this report with some last perspectives related to student retention.

Institutional Leadership. Ultimate success of a campus-wide retention effort depends on the unequivocal support from the Office of the President or Provost, the involvement of the entire campus in shaping program operations, and the important practice of keeping ideology focused on the student.

Funding Priorities. Retention costs money, but the savings can be recouped in later years. If increased student persistence is the end goal, funding must be made available in the general budget to enact a retention program.

Faculty Reward Systems. If faculty members are to turn more of their attention to student needs and teaching as a whole, the institution must incorporate these actions into the tenure structure.

Student-Teacher Interaction. Classroom instruction requires time to develop the student-teacher interactions that can make a difference, which requires the reduction of major burdens on faculty.

Flexible Planning. Student retention programs must be designed to match the characteristics and conditions at each campus. Programs that work well on one campus do not necessarily work well on another campus. The students, faculty, and institutional mission bring different aspects to the campus that makes it unique, and these characteristics must be considered in the planning cycle.

Institutional Research. The campus institutional research (IR) office is potentially the greatest resource for campus leadership and faculty. Empirical information should be the foundation of any retention effort, and careful planning must be taken to ensure that appropriate indicators are selected and high-quality data collected.

Academic Preparation and Admissions. Recent affirmative action litigation has forced campuses to rethink their admissions practices. One answer to this problem for colleges is to further encourage and develop the academic preparation of minority students. College and universities are coming to the understanding that they need to play a stronger role during the pre-college years.

College Affordability. College pricing is a major factor in whether students go to college, as well as where they go. Since 1980, tuition and fees at four-year public and private institutions has risen about 90 percent after adjusting for inflation, student aid has increased around 40 percent and median family income has only increased 9 percent (College Board, 2001). Colleges and state systems must continue to remove price as a major disincentive for needy students.

Technology. Recent developments in web-based technologies have begun to affect how colleges and universities can deliver instruction, and how students and professors may communicate. While technology has the potential to remove barriers of time and distance, it simultaneously may widen gaps in access between low- and high-income students—between the technological haves and have-nots. Colleges and universities must take special care to ensure that students from all backgrounds have access and comfort with technology.

About the Authors

Watson Scott Swail is the President of The Educational Policy Institute, a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization dedicated to policy research on educational opportunity. Recent publications by Dr. Swail include “Higher Education and the New Demographics” in Change (2002), “Pre-College Outreach Programs: A National Perspective” in Tierney and Hagedorn’s Increasing Access to College, and “Beyond Access: Increasing the Odds of College Success” (Phi Delta Kappan, May 2000). Dr. Swail serves on a number of national advisory committees, including technical review panels for the major U.S. longitudinal and cross-sectional surveys sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Swail received his Doctorate in educational policy from the George Washington University, Washington, DC, Master’s of Science from Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, and his Bachelor’s of Education from the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

Kenneth E. Redd is Director of Research and Policy Analysis for the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) in Washington, DC. Prior to joining NASFAA in November 2000, Mr. Redd was Director of Higher Education Research for the USA Group Foundation. Mr. Redd is the author or co-author of numerous research reports, book chapters, and journal articles on a wide variety of issues in higher education. He holds a Master’s degree in Public Affairs from the University of Minnesota, and a Bachelor’s degree in English and Political Science from Tufts University.

Laura W. Perna is an assistant professor in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland. Dr. Perna’s research has been published in the Journal of Higher Education, the Review of Higher Education, Research in Higher Education, the Journal of College Student Development, and the Journal of Student Financial Aid, as well as in edited books and other journals.
Leaks in the Pipeline:
Percentage of Four-Year Students that Leave Postsecondary Education, by year, family income, and race/ethnicity

NOTE: Cohort of students that began their postsecondary education experience at the four-year level.
Student retention at U.S. postsecondary institutions is a growing issue on the minds of policymakers at the state and federal levels. While postsecondary enrollment has increased seven-fold since the mid 1900s to approximately 15 million students each year, our ability to keep students in school remains a difficult and complex challenge. Congress has clung on to this issue because the institutional graduation rate has held at a constant 50 percent for most of the past half century. Put another way, half of all students that enter the gates of higher education fail to realize the dreams and aspirations that led them there in the first place.

This concern on behalf of policymakers is hard to dispute. While there are valid reasons why some students choose to leave postsecondary education, a 50 percent net persistence rate is hardly a model of efficiency. If higher education was in a position to act in a free-market manner like traditional businesses, such inefficiency wouldn’t be tolerated. High-end private institutions in the US are the closest thing to a true free-market economy, building their programs to attract the best and brightest and setting tuition rates to match demand. These institutions tend to retain most of their students to degree. Of course, they have the resources to provide the necessary services that make a difference for students. Other institutions, especially those considered open admission, clearly don’t possess endowments that remotely approach those of highly selective institutions.

As director of the Pell Institute in Washington, DC (www.pellinstitute.org) a few years back, I directed a national study on student retention sponsored by the Lumina Foundation for Education. We visited 19 public and private four-year institutions across the country: half with an encouraging history of retaining low-income students; others not so encouraging. We found that those things that made a difference included caring faculty, appropriate programming, monitoring of student activities and performance, among others. But more often than not, we found that money made a huge difference in an institution’s ability to allocate the necessary resources to the areas most needed. Other, less affluent institutions were unable to make these changes in practice, simply because they didn’t have the funding to make the decisions.

The last thing that policymakers want to hear is that they need to throw money at the problem. They’ve been doing that for decades in K-12, and state legislators and members of Congress aren’t very hip on burning money at the post-secondary level. But if we truly believe that open admissions institutions are important to our postsecondary system as a whole, and we expect them to do better on the retention issue, then an increase in fiscal resources to those institutions in some manner will be necessary.

Several things need to happen to facilitate a significant change in the aggregate retention rates of students. From the macro to the micro level, we start with the federal government and end with the student. The feds need to put more money and more emphasis on institutional quality and student retention. That doesn’t mean they should regulate it; it means they should continue their current concern (as evidence by Representative McKeon’s recent statements) and provide support to institutions that need it. At the state level, where economies are in seriously dire straits, legislators must realize that increasing both quality and student retention is good for business and good for the bottom line. Believe it or not, spending more can save money in the long run. Next come institutions. Administrators need to rethink how they “package” education for customers. As stated, some of our more selective institutions do a great job of servicing students; so do many public institutions. But it certainly isn’t institutionalized across systems. Remember the slogan “Customers are Job One?” A good motto for higher education that is often forgotten. Fourth, parents must become more involved in the choice their children make and provide necessary support. This is especially tough for single, low-income, and first-generation parents (many who are all three!) who struggle to make ends meet. They need additional support from government and community. Some of our faith-based community programs have shown excellent willingness and resources to help students from their congregations prepare, enroll, and succeed at college.

Finally, we end with the student. Students must take more responsibility for their success and failure in postsecondary education. Children of the “me” and “now” generation need to understand that the decisions and behaviors they make or exhibit now can alter the direction of their entire life. Of course, try telling that to a 16-year old. But somehow they need to get that message, and this goes back to how community organizations, as well as state and federal governments, work to get the message out. Think of it as a large PR campaign. If students don’t hear the message, they are less likely to take appropriate actions.