INTRUSIVE ADVISING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN RESIDENCE HALLS


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# Abstract

Intrusive advising is a concept that developed in the 1970s as a method of working with at-risk students by identifying challenges they faced and solutions to overcome them (Backhus, 1989). Intrusive contacts are those that make early, unsolicited contact with students in the hopes of identifying and resolving academic and social obstacles that would prevent persistence (Frost, 1991). This proactive approach has been experiencing revitalization in the current economic times due to declining funds and changing governmental funding models that would fund higher education on the basis of graduation rather than enrollment. Because 44 percent of first year students do not persist to their second year, this type of governmental funding model has profound implications for administrators (Bushong, 2009). I propose that administrators consider restructuring residence hall personnel responsibilities to include intrusive contacts in an effort to address retention issues. While residence hall personnel will not have the responsibility of scheduling classes, they can begin identifying and addressing issues earlier in the semester. This paper identifies several institutions that currently implement intrusive contacts in their residence halls and the benefits of doing so. These schools have indicated an increase in their students' grades, commitment and persistence, and overall satisfaction since implementing intrusive contacts (B. Silliman, personal communication, November 1, 2012). The findings also revealed that residence halls with effective intrusive contacts involve collaborative efforts between student affairs personnel and faculty members, engage students in building rapport with staff early in their first semester, and focus on developing students holistically. This report provides a summary of best practices and strategies for implementing these contacts.

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# Dedication

This report is dedicated to my loving family, Jeffrey, Pamela, Meghann, and Olivia, and my extended family, the Nelsons, for all of their constant encouragement. I could not have believed or achieved my dreams if it had not been for their faithful support. I also owe a lot of gratitude to the professionals in the field who helped lend their experience and wisdom to aid in culminating this information. My final recognition goes to my report committee who faithfully read version after version to bring this report to completion.

**Intrusive Advising and Its Implementation in Residence Halls**

Numbers tell a story, and the story being told by today's higher education enrollment and retention figures is not one to be ignored. Forty-one percent of 18-to-24-year-olds in the United States opted to enroll in higher education in 2010 (United States Census Bureau, 2012). In 2009, statistics revealed 66 percent of freshmen persisting to their second year in college (Bushong, 2009). Today's students are bright, ambitious individuals flocking to higher education in the hopes of gaining employment upon the completion of their degrees. However, these statistics reveal that something occurs between freshman and senior year that changes the minds of 44 percent of these individuals.

The factors contributing to the decline of retention rates have evolved as a prevalent research topic over the past 50 years. Early research focused on the pre-enrollment characteristics of students, such as academic ability and socio-economic class, as indicators of why students chose not to persist (Schmid, 1966). Institutions felt little obligation to assume responsibility for why students were choosing not to return. Later research examined institutional factors, such as their lack of resources or connections among personnel and students, as possible reasons for attrition (Gardner, 1991). These findings led to a philosophical shift in retention efforts and support services.

Prior to declining budgets and enlarging student bodies, the philosophy towards providing student services could be summarized as survival of the fittest. The birth of research institutions in the 1950s brought about large, complex institutional systems that, over time, became increasingly more difficult for students to independently navigate. While institutions and student services expanded, personnel expected students to possess the ability to self-identify problems and make appropriate self-referrals to resources. This approach has been referred to as laissez-faire and centered on support services being used by students on a voluntary, nondirective basis (Fonte, 1997). In this approach the institution's only obligation to student success was the provision of support resources. Retention studies, however, quickly revealed that academic support is not the only support needed by first year students. Rather, institutions began to incorporate a more holistic approach to supporting their students including academic, career, relationship, and identity development support initiatives (Gardner, 1991).

Administrators should be aware that the navigation of complex institutional organizations is not one that comes intuitively to many of today's freshmen. Today's students are

characterized by low orientation to adult responsibility (Earl, 1988) and are underprepared for collegiate course work (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Administrators and personnel have mistakenly equated the presence of resources to mean the usage of resources. In light of today's students, this assumption is a costly one; the retention statistics reveal the price. Students cannot be expected to identify the areas they require assistance or possess the ability to independently find resources (Earl, 1988). In fact, many of today's students are entering higher education facilities with the expectation that personnel act as authoritative experts by guiding them through the institutional maze (Elam, Stratton & Gibson, 2007). These students are characterized by high motivation and an appreciation for structure. Few of today's eighteen-year-olds have had the opportunity to develop independence as their parents have often acted on their behalf (T. Barlage, personal communication, November 8, 2012). Students need a structured approach that allows them to develop independence over a span of time rather than all at once. One technique that enables students to accomplish this is intrusive advising.

The appearance of more supportive approaches began in the 1970s with the emergence of intrusive advising. This form of advising sought to ensure that students are connecting with the resources available for them. Intrusive advising is action oriented to involving and motivating students to seek help prior to academic dismissal (Earl, 1988). This active approach alleviates the self-referral problem and initiates problem identification and solutions prior to them evolving into crisis. Intrusive advising has been found to improve GPAs, study skills, time management, and class attendance (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). The early contacts have helped students better navigate the institution, become familiar with resources, believe personnel are more approachable, and discuss problems before they are overwhelming (Earl, 1988). This approach is not about prying into students' lives; rather it is about initiating unsolicited contact in order to provide resources in case students feel the need for assistance. These contacts are aimed at helping students who would typically not seek out advising or resources to do so [National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), 2012].

Because intrusive advising has been an effective retention strategy, it makes sense that incorporating similar elements into other areas of student affairs may have similar results. The residence halls serve as a primary location for intrusive strategies to be applied. The residence halls are ideal because students spend much of their time there. While residence hall professionals are not responsible for advising students about academic course work, they could

incorporate elements of intrusive advising such as making early contact with students, identifying academic and social barriers to students' goals, and helping students facilitate a plan to overcome these barriers. While intrusive contacts serve to identify obstacles and create plans to address them, it also helps establish connections between personnel and students. The development of significant relationships between university personnel and students has been shown to positively impact retention (Gardner, 1991). Because residence life professionals live and work alongside students, it makes them ideal initiators of initial intrusive contacts. The inclusion of intrusive contact strategies within the housing context could bring about improved persistence rates among a host of other benefits.

## Retention

### Funding Focused

Retention efforts have become prominent within higher education due to the current financial budgets of collegiate institutions. Higher education can no longer look with certainty to public and state supported sources of funding. Collegiate institutions receive funding through three principal means—federal government, state government, and donations. The federal government funds higher education through research grants, and it funds students through financial aid (pell grants). Federal cuts made due to the recession have yet to return to their original levels and are predicted not to return to their original levels (Grummon, 2011). Similarly, state governments provide funding to institutions through appropriations and grants. State governments' funds are impacted by the amount of tax revenues generated that, in turn, impact the amount of grants and appropriations higher education institutions will receive. States have reduced their funding of higher education with cuts ranging from 0.1 to 21.1 percent. In addition to the decline in funds being issued, some states are changing the criteria for issuing their funds. For example, Texas is considering issuing its appropriations and grants to institutions based on graduation rates rather than enrollment rates (Mangan, 2012). Lastly, beyond governmental support, institutions receive financial gifts from donors, but these contributions have dropped by 11.9 percent in 2009. This decline is one of the steepest since contribution recording began in 1969.

Recently universities have sought to generate funding through increased tuition rates; yet, families and students cannot be burdened with the entire cost of earning a degree. From 1995 to 2004, tuition has risen by 98.1 percent at four-year, public institutions (Kennedy & Ishler, 2008).

For the first time since American higher education began, the cost of attendance has now exceeded as much as $60,000 per year (Little, 2012). It is estimated that 16.9 percent of family income is required to pay for one child to attend a four-year, public institution [National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), 2012]. The financial burden on families with more than one child in attendance can be clearly seen within this percentage. With these statistics it is no wonder that many of today's students are struggling to afford the cost of higher education. Students fund their education through personal income, loans, and financial aid. The most popular of the three options is loans, with more than 50 percent of today's students having loans as part of their financial aid packet (Kennedy & Ishler, 2008). Nationally the student loan debt total surpasses one trillion dollars with the average, outstanding loan balance totaled at $26,682 (Little, 2012). Following loans in popularity are financial aid packets. Need-based financial aid has increased by 120.7 percent over the past several years. More students have become dependent upon financial aid in order to obtain a degree.

Retention can be summarized as a financial strategy for institutions. Keeping students is less expensive than recruiting new students to fill the voids created by those who left. This, when paired with changing governmental funding models, has made retention efforts prevalent within collegiate missions. Retention efforts in the past focused on students' precollege deficiencies or socioeconomic backgrounds, largely ignoring potential institutional or environmental defects (Schmid, 1966). These studies resulted in the provision of academic remediation services including tutoring in reading, writing, and mathematics (Schrader & Brown, 2008). Recent retention research has sought to examine the institutional impact on students' decision to persist. Students enter institutions with characteristics, such as family background, personal attributes, and experiences that influence their college performance and institutional commitments (Terenzini & Pascerella, 1978). Tinto (1988) asserts, however, that interactions between individuals and the environment hold more significance for persistence than students' pre-collegiate attributes. Terenzini and Pascarella's study (1978) discovered what occurs to students after entering college is more influential in voluntary attrition than the attributes they bring to college. Less than four percent of voluntary attrition can be attributed to traits such as sex, academic aptitude, and high school achievements. Another study reveals that the development of academic competence can be primarily attributed to the experience students have during their first year rather than the pre-characteristics they brought with them to college

(Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006).  While Tinto's, Terenzini's, and Pascerella's works have enlightened practitioners that what occurs during the first year of college correlates significantly with students' decisions to persist, this does not negate the fact that first year students' pre-collegiate traits do influence their experiences in their institutions. Although the literature and research is inconclusive on whether pre-collegiate traits or institutional factors hold more influence on persistence, it is clear that the first year serves as a critical time for developing institutional commitment and persistence.

**First Year Focused**

Because the majority of institutional attrition occurs during the first year of college or before the start of the second year, many institutions are aiming retention efforts towards first year students (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005).  This focus on first year students is not a new trend in higher education; in fact, administrators noticed freshmen needed help adjusting to institutional expectations in the late nineteenth century (Gordon, 1989).  Retention efforts included the formation of freshmen seminar courses, extended orientations, and living learning communities. Many of these early support programs have become part of the institutional norm after retention studies revealed them to have impact on freshmen persistence rates (Fidler, 1991).

In order to understand what can be done to solve the persistence problem, personnel must understand what causes freshmen attrition.  When research on the challenges faced by freshmen began in the 1920s and 1930s it identified curriculum adjustments, budgeting, student activities, and transitions as being most problematic to successful retention (Dwyer, 1989). More recent studies have expanded to include adding goal setting, commitments, and institutional fit (Tinto, 2001).  According to Lau (2003), the leading causes of drop out among freshmen students can be attributed to four factors. The first set of characteristics are those that are beyond institutional control such as students' lack of finances, poor student-institution fit, changing academic or career goals, or personal circumstances. The second factor pertains to whether institutions have created environments that are supportive of students' individual educational needs.  The third factor is students' inability to manage schoolwork or maintain motivation.  The fourth factor is the lack of good role models or mentors in the community.  It is critical that these factors be identified and addressed early on within their first semester if students are to be retained.

Tinto (2002) makes five recommendations for institutions seeking to address retention factors.  He believes that institutions should demonstrate commitment to student success by

providing incentives and investing resources in their persistence.  Institutions can also set higher expectations and demonstrate accountability to those standards.  The provision of feedback on students' performances is vital to their decision to persist.  Institutions with higher retention rates also provide multiple forms of support including academic, social, and financial.  Finally, institutions should provide opportunities for students to be involved academically and socially.

Each of Tinto's recommendations can be addressed and implemented through academic advising. Academic advising refers to situations where "an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 3).  Advising provides an opportunity for advisors to explore students' commitments and knowledge of institutional expectations.  It also enables advisors to provide support and feedback and recommend opportunities for involvement. It typically seeks to explain institutional culture, procedures, and policies as they relate to students' curricular or personal needs (Gordon, 1992). Crockett suggest that advising is an effective retention tool because it has demonstrated positive increases in the achievement of higher grade point averages, completion of degrees, satisfaction with the institution, and attainment of educational and career ambitions (as cited in Gordon, 1992). Advising can be implemented through a variety of approaches.  The historical exploration of the development of advising and its various approaches reveals the emergence of intrusive advising as an effective form to apply towards first year student persistence.

## History of Advising

### Prescriptive Advising

Advising was among the numerous roles and responsibilities of the earliest faculty and presidents (Gordon, 1992). Early colleges were mostly religious, private institutions whose purpose was to redeem men and train them to lead moral lives.  The earliest advising approach had university personnel act in loco parentis, meaning institutions served as guardians of students (Cook, 2009). Advisors acted as instructors, teaching young men how to become leaders within their communities (Thelin, 2004).  These early advising sessions focused primarily on guiding students through matters relating to extracurricular involvement, intellectual habits, and moral living.  Advising was thus perceived as prescribing students moral and instructional guidance from an authoritarian point of view. Advisors were expected to predict the needs of students, make diagnoses, and prescribe solutions (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

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Later this approach became called "prescriptive advising" because it followed prescribed curriculum requirements, rules, and regulations (Earl, 1988). It focused primarily on performance outcomes and ignored student motivation. This approach has been criticized for inhibiting students' abilities to develop decision-making skills, as the advisor acts to instruct students in all they should do (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

By the establishment of the first formal system of advising at Johns Hopkins University in 1876 (Tuttle, 2000), the social environment of most campuses had become formalized and rigid (Kuhn, 2008). Administrators sought to control students through strict, inflexible systems of rules, regulations, and punishments (Kuhn, 2008). This system created a gulf between faculty and students. Students frequently acted out in riots and disorderly conduct. With much animosity existing between these two groups, advising responsibilities became difficult to carry out. Things changed, however, with the introduction of the elective system in 1899 (Gordon, 1989). The elective system helped to change campus climate because it created a broader curriculum that helped satisfy students' complaints and allowed faculty acting as advisors to build healthier relationships with their advisees. A broader curriculum also meant faculty specialization (Kuhn, 2008). Faculty had increasingly less time to dedicate to advising students, which created a need for academic advisors responsible for helping students, navigate curriculum in accordance with their ambitions. It was the birth of the elective system that brought about the definition and presence of advising responsibilities.

Simultaneous to curriculum expansion was the growth and diversification of student affairs roles. Women entered the higher education scene both as students and as personnel during the first half of the nineteenth century (Thelin, 2004). Collegiate institutions for women were first opened as academies or seminaries to prepare women for their traditional roles of housekeepers. Also, the development of normal schools brought about alternative careers for women as teachers. These new facilities and career paths for women led to openings at collegiate institutions, such as Lady Principles or Matrons, due to the need for the supervision and guidance of female students (Gordon, 1992).

Redistribution of advising responsibilities began to occur during the 1920s. For the first time since advising's conception, faculty were not the only personnel on campuses responsible for providing advising services. The advising focus also broadened to become more specialized focusing on three areas—the personal, vocational, and academic. Rather than one faculty

member being responsible for the holistic development of their assigned students, departments began tailoring their advising to their areas of expertise.  Student service centers began to appear focusing on career advising, counseling services, and academic assistance.  Accompanying these developments was a new emphasis on the importance of advising freshmen and creating freshmen orientation courses to help ease their transition to college life (Cook, 2009).  In this sense, advising began to be specialized and tailored towards student needs.

By the 1930s most colleges had some form of structured academic advising on their campuses. While some institutions quickly adapted to advising being a shared responsibility among university personnel, many schools had faculty members serve as the primary providers of academic advising until the 1960s (Cook, 2009).  Although slow in its transition, by the 1970s academic advising became a staple among student services.

Several factors accelerated the professionalization and diversification of advising approaches during the '60s and '70s.  Research led to an increased emphasis on retention and examining advising for most effective approaches. The enrollment growth created through the passing of the G.I. Bill after World War II brought many nontraditional students to higher education (Thelin, 2004).  Retaining these students when paired with increased high school graduation rates led to increased research on how to serve and retain a diverse student body. Most institutions began utilizing advising as a tool to resolve retention problems by addressing student concerns through personal attention. These efforts led to the establishment of The National Academic Advising Association, NACADA, in 1977 in order to promote quality academic advising and enhance the educational development of students (NACADA, 2012). The increasingly diverse student body when coupled with advising becoming a professionalized field led many institutions to provide centralized advising services that would alleviate faculty members from serving in this role (Cook, 2009).

**Developmental Advising**

Crookston (1972) introduced an article that called teachers to be critical of how their interactions facilitated the personal growth of the students they advised. Administrators and faculty members began to consider how individuals engaged in tasks for personal growth.  This research led to advising being conceived as a process, an orientation, and a context of integrating systems (Raushi, 1993).  This new approach to advising was determined to be developmental and originated in the mid-1960s as part of a new research movement (Raushi, 1993). Through this

research advisors became concerned with facilitating rational processes; environmental and interpersonal interactions; behavioral awareness; and problem solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills within a personal and vocational context (Crookston, 1972).

Advisors' roles shifted from the authoritarian prescriber of curriculum decisions to role models, coaches, teachers, and friends. This new focus brought about a concern for establishing a caring relationship (Ender, Winston, & Miller, 1982). In this relationship the advisor was expected to communicate on topics broader than the traditional curriculum discussions to include the holistic development of the student they served.

Developmental advising operates from the campus ecology premise that seeks to understand people based on their interactions within various systems (Raushi, 1993). Thus, advising moved from focusing on prescribing goals to students, to focusing on students becoming an active part of developing their goals. For the first time since the origins of advising, students were encouraged to take ownership of the advising process as well as the outcomes. Advisors began to explain the process of advising and encourage students to understand their own development (Miller & McCaffrey, 1982).

Advisors initiate the developmental process by utilizing students' existing life challenges or conflicts. Developmental advisors seek to understand the developmental tasks faced by students and help to create an environment that allows students to progress through their development. This method focuses on generating and furthering students' goals and seeks to establish a caring relationship between advisor and advisee. Developmental advising also emphasizes the impact that caring relationships, mentors, and collaboration between faculty members and student affairs personnel can have on students (Raushi, 1993).

**Intrusive Advising**

Advising approaches continued to expand as more research produced results that advising has positive impact on retention. This expansion included intrusive advising, a circulating concept mostly applied to students considered at-risk for leaving their institution (Backhus, 1989). Although research in 1973 provided evidence that intrusive counseling techniques correlated with retention (Cook, 2009), it did not share in the initial popularity of developmental advising. As retention became a priority, institutions gave consideration to students' academic preparedness. Institutions sought to combine traditional prescriptive and developmental approaches to reach out to students struggling academically (Backhus, 1989). This new

combination was effective with at-risk students and made intrusive advising become more than a concept.

Earl (1988) defined intrusive advising to mean "a deliberate, structured intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty in order to motivate a student to seek help" (p. 28). Earl attributes the development of the term "intrusive" to Tinto's work that established intrusive as synonymous with personal variables and informal interactions. The concept has continued to develop to mean advising interactions that focus on intentional, personal, and motivational elements of student staff interactions.

Intrusive advising differs from prescriptive and developmental approaches in that its primary goal is to help students identify and develop specific courses of actions in order to help them overcome their perceived challenges (Frost, 1991). This approach aims to facilitate informed, responsible decision-making, increase student awareness and motivation in problem solving, and ensure students' academic success (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). The intrusive advising method places the advising responsibility jointly on university personnel, who operate as initiators of conversation, and students, who function as the decision makers. This approach demonstrates a major progression from the original prescriptive approach used on colonial campuses. Advisors are no longer authoritarian figures directing the lives of students; rather advisors are facilitators of discussions serving to enable students to make their own decisions.

During the 1990s, intrusive advising evolved to include appreciative advising. Appreciative advising parallels intrusive advising in that its based on the belief that asking open-ended, intrusive questions helps bring about awareness and resolution to student problems (Bloom & Martin, 2002). Like intrusive advising, appreciative advising believes in the goodness of each student, uses questions to uncover students' passions, helps students formulate future goals and ways to achieve them, and holds students accountable to their goals. Appreciative advising focuses primarily on gaining insight into students' strengths, abilities, and skills and utilizing this information to help motivate and maximize students' performance. Because appreciative advising shares so many commonalities with intrusive advising, some advisors believe them to be the same thing. Both forms of advising are valuable since they help students identify their strengths and align them with institutional expectations through early contact and affirmative questioning.

**Theoretical Foundations of Intrusive Advising**

Advising consists of more than an approach.  Most advising approaches are founded on theories and postulates.  In order for personnel to be effective in applying various advising approaches they should understand the theories and assumptions related to the approach they wish to use with their students. In the case of intrusive advising, Vincent Tinto's and Alexander Astin's student development theories along with Abraham Maslow's psychology theory may be used to understand why intrusive advising is an effective approach (Tinto, 1988; Astin, 1984; McLeod, 2007). Examining several of the underlying assumptions can help explain the premise and motivation behind the intrusive approach.

**Tinto's Student Departure Theory**

Vincent Tinto (1988) began his research hoping to explain why the first few months of college are critical to persistence and retention.  What he discovered is that students will typically face the same series of stages when they transition from one community (high school and family) to another (college). Tinto's Student Departure Theory is a framework that suggests first year students pass through transitional stages during their first year of college.  The students who fail to progress through these stages will often cease to persist onto the next year of college. Tinto summarizes the stages into three phases—separation, transition, and incorporation.

During the first stage, separation, students dissociate themselves from their past community (Tinto, 1988).  Separation can include parting from past habits and patterns of affiliation.  Students struggle in this stage will be determined by the worth they attach to attaining a college degree as well as the degree to which they can adopt the appropriate collegiate behaviors and norms.  Students who cannot adapt to the new culture will have an increasingly harder time persisting.  Tinto believes that in order for students to fully integrate they must disassociate themselves from their former communities.

The second stage, transition, is when students are between their past associations and the hoped for associations of the present (Tinto, 1988).  In this stage students have yet to acquire the norms and behaviors required to be a member in the collegiate community. They also have yet to create personal bonds between themselves and their new community.  In other words, they are not bound to their past community or secure in their present community.  Many students depart from the institution due to their inability to navigate and cope with transitional stress and make connections in their new community.  It is during this stage that student affairs personnel have an opportunity to identify those struggling from the stress of transition as well as those who have

yet to socially integrate within their new community. Tinto points out that students persist to the degree that they are committed to their educational goals and the institution.  Examining students' motivation and commitment will allow personnel insight into students' ability to progress through the transition stage.

The key to persistence is found in the third stage, incorporation. Incorporation, from Tinto's definition, means students' ability to integrate and partake in the social and academic communities at an institution (1988).  Students must establish connections with their peers, faculty, and student personnel; those who lack these connections often depart.  Institutions need to provide opportunities for repetitive contact with other members in the community because this increases students' ability to integrate.  Tinto points out that new students are often left to themselves to navigate the maze of institutional life.  Not all students have the appropriate skills to do this nor do they possess the support system to aid them through the process.

**Astin's Student Involvement Theory**

Complementing Tinto's concept of social and academic integration is Astin's Student Involvement Theory.  Astin (1984) defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy students devote to the academic experience" (518).  His theory sought to analyze how college students were spending their time and the impact their behaviors had on their persistence.  The theory examines students' investment into activities by both the amount of time they invest and their comprehension of involvement.  It is built on the premise that involvement occurs on a continuum and that students will be invested at differing degrees. It also suggests that learning and development are directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement.  Student affairs personnel should be concerned with how students are spending their time and whether those investments further the holistic development of their students.  In order to develop and grow students will need to have more than a physical presence on a college campus, they will need to be engaged in their surroundings.  This echoes Tinto's idea that social integration is vital to student persistence and retention.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory has several implications for retention and persistence.  His studies have found that the decision to persist or not is directly related to the proportion of students' involvement within the institution (Astin, 1984).  Most of the factors leading to students' decision not to persist relate back to factors that imply lack of involvement.  If students are not investing time or commitment towards earning a college degree, it is likely

that they will cease to pursue it.  In studying the decision to dropout, Astin discovered that the more students can identify with their institution, the easier it is for them to become involved in that environment, leading to increased persistence and institutional commitment.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Abraham Maslow began researching what creates human motivation (McLeod, 2007). His work revealed that the fulfillment of progressively complex human needs inspires humans' actions.  Maslow's original theory suggested that humans have five basic needs, and these needs must be met from lowest to highest level needs.  The first category of needs is biological including food, sleep, and shelter.  Safety is the next category where humans seek out protection, security, and knowledge of the laws and limitations placed on them.  The third category is the need to be loved and belong, which can include creating and maintaining relationships and receiving affirmation.  The fourth category is the fulfillment of esteem through achievement, independence, and sense of status.  The final category is self-actualizing needs where people realize their personal potential, self-fulfillment, and personal growth.

Maslow's theory can be applied first year students struggling to progress through the transitional phases Tinto outlines.   First year students experience new found freedoms once arriving on campus where many are left to independently manage the fulfillment of basic biological and safety needs.  Students need to know how to appropriately manage the fulfillment of these needs if they are to be successful during their first year of college or persist to their second. They also need to feel a sense of belonging in their new community, which Tinto points out as making connections with peers, faculty, and staff.  Finally, first year students also need to experience some form of initial success in their academics and social interactions in order to develop positive self-efficacy.  Those who do not experience success may begin to falter in their attempts because they become discouraged or believe they cannot meet the expectations that are asked of them.

Intrusive advising responds to each of these theories because it seeks to foster students' awareness and personal connections at the university.  Through intrusive questioning personnel can gain perspective on where students are at in their academic and social integration; therefore, personnel are helping students identify barriers and strategies to overcome them. Early contacts that initiate questioning can help personnel identify the needs of their students that are going unfulfilled.  As personnel come to know students, they can help identify organizations or

resources that help students find their niche on campus. These relationships further students' commitment to their institution. In this way, intrusive advising is an effective approach and response to each of the stages of departure as outlined by Tinto's theory; it helps personnel identify how students are spending their time which Astin's research correlates to effective retention; and it helps identify and respond to unfulfilled basic needs as stated by Maslow's theory.

**Intrusive Advising Postulates**

Beyond theory, intrusive advising is founded on several postulates. The first postulate assumes that university personnel can be trained to identify student needs, problems, and concerns (Earl, 1988). If personnel can appropriately identify students' problems and the resources that can help them, students become more likely to respond to direct contact. Students can also be taught the skills needed for their success. It is the responsibility of personnel to collaboratively develop these skills with students.

The second postulate holds that student deficiencies are treatable. Intrusive advising responds to student deficiencies through the development of specific courses of actions. This form of advising functions on the belief that when personnel contact students early students gain motivation, remain engaged through challenges, and build supportive, personal connections between students and staff.

The third postulate believes that students are less inclined to initiate contact with student service offices to resolve their concerns; thus, it becomes the responsibility of personnel to make contact (Holmes, 2005). Contemporary universities place an expectation on incoming students to navigate their institutions. Faculty often hold the expectation that freshmen will enter college having already developed competencies in academic skills, cultural know-how, the ability to balance school with other demands, and engage in help seeking behaviors (Karp & Bork, 2012). While these are the expectations, few faculty members or college personnel actively explain and demonstrate what these expectations mean so that freshmen can be truly successful. Intrusive advising seeks to establish early connections with freshmen so as to help them gain the skills they will need to navigate the institutional maze as well as develop strategies for success.

**An Answer to Retention Woes**

Freshmen retention studies reveal that students need advising beyond academics including relationships, identity development, career decision-making, wellness, and

understanding the purposes of a college education (Gardner, 1991). Because intrusive advising is holistic in nature it seeks to enable students to make decisions for themselves rather than prescribing answers. Intrusive advising is an effective retention approach because it demonstrates care for students, connects students to resources, and facilitates decision-making skills that help prepare students to be successful beyond college.

This approach is effective because it helps students feel connected with the institution through meaningful interactions with university personnel. Students who possess at least one significant relationship with an employee of their institution are more likely to persist and graduate than those who do not (Gardner, 1991). Heisserer and Parette (2002) found that the only variable discovered to possess a direct effect on student persistence is the quality of relationships students have with university personnel. Lundeberg and Schreiner (2004) study defined quality interactions as those where personnel demonstrated nonverbal behaviors, such as smiling, maintaining eye contact, and leaning towards the student and verbal behaviors, such as praising student behavior and providing constructive feedback. These interactions can often negate the most commonly reported reasons students depart from higher education such as students experiencing lack of resources, having low self-efficacy, lacking social and academic integration, and feeling poor fit with their chosen major (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). An intrusive approach to advising values genuine connections between personnel and students that, in turn, increases retention.

When university personnel implement an intrusive approach it serves as an early warning to help students identify obstacles and the resources to overcome them before they become too overwhelming. These intrusive contacts help students gain familiarity with resources, build self-confidence, and integrate into social and academic communities. Students are placed in situations where they are asked to make decisions about their collegiate and professional plans. Tinto asserts that effective retention is dependent upon students possessing the knowledge and skills needed to meet the demands of an institution (as cited in Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Intrusive contacts are beneficial because they reveal early the knowledge and skills students are lacking and connect students to the resources they will need to succeed (Holmes, 2005).

**Characteristics of Intrusive Advising**

Personnel can identify intrusive elements as those taking into account the unique background characteristics of each student, occurring in a one-on-one context, and extending

discussions beyond basic orientation information to include life goals and perceived challenges (Miller, 2010).  Practitioners who effectively implement intrusive advising within their jobs have several characteristics in common.  Intrusive advisors primarily serve as information disseminators (Gordon, 1992).  True to its historical development, students often view advisors as authorities holding information and resources to provide guidance. The way that information is distributed is important to the advising process.  Advisors should be aware that some students prefer printed materials while others prefer hearing information or online resources.

Successful advisors are also those who know their institution (Thomas & Minton, 2004). Being knowledgeable about the institution allows personnel to accurately refer students to the resources they may need.  Personnel should make an effort to be familiar with the various departments on campus and their roles in student success.  Staff should possess concrete knowledge of what each department does, the programs and services that are provided, as well as the population it is designed to serve.  When advisors give accurate referral information that includes appropriate names and services, it increases students' chances of success.  While many staff may be able to give an idea of each department, training is needed to extend this knowledge beyond the surface level.  Of particular importance is the understanding of how each department relates to students as well as the institution as a whole.

Beyond being knowledgeable, practitioners should also be available to students (Thomas & Minton, 2004).  Although practitioners frequently have full calendars an effort should be made to keep some hours in the day open for walk-in appointments or spontaneous student interactions.  Personnel should strive to keep a degree of flexibility that can serve students needs as they arise.  When staff makes contact with students they should make an effort to continuously monitor those students' progress.  A plan should be made during student consultations on how follow-ups will look and how frequently they will occur. Practitioners must develop monitoring skills, which allow them to keep accurate records of the advising process, student's action plan, and deadlines for following up (Gordon, 1992).  Regular monitoring allows for the identification and resolution of problems before they become too difficult to resolve.  A good practice is to have a set time to review files and ensure that follow ups are occurring on a regular basis.

Part of the intrusive advising approach is to enable students to generate goals and how to achieve them. This plan should develop as the result of joint collaboration between students and

staff. Advisors should possess the ability to instruct students on how to formulate and write goals as well as plan for academic, career, and personal growth (Ender et al., 1982). Competencies in this area should include goal setting, formulating, assessing, and writing behavioral objectives. Advisors should also be knowledgeable about decision-making strategies, study skill techniques, and career exploration.

Intrusive advising is characterized by fostering decision-making skills in students. As such, intrusive advisors must have the ability to help students make decisions at multiple levels and on various topics. Advisors should possess a thorough knowledge of varying decision-making styles. While advising students, practitioners should be cautious not to impose their own personal decision-making style upon students. Rather, they should help guide students to identify problems, generate alternatives, and select realistic directions.

Counseling skills are integral to those serving in an advising capacity (Gordon, 1992). Advisors should have the ability to reflect and clarify what students are saying to ensure that advisors correctly understand the information being presented. Listening is critical to the process and is characterized by concentrating on the message not the deliverer, eliminating distractions, avoiding the urge to interrupt, and adopting good nonverbal, such as eye contact and posture. Effective practitioners have honed the ability to ask probing, open-ended questions that encourage student participation and direction throughout the conversation (Frost, 1991). Initial conversations should center on an exploration of students' background, studying habits, time management, and familiarity with the institution. This knowledge serves as a baseline to guide practitioners in helping students develop their personal strategy for overcoming the limitations and obstacles they may be facing. Asking specific questions can help students think more concretely about their circumstances (Gordon, 1992). Typically, these conversations take place in a one-on-one setting and are aimed at equipping students with knowledge beyond basics, such as registration and college policies, to include life skills and goals (Miller, 2010).

### Intrusive Advising's Place in the Residence Halls

Although most of the literature on intrusive advising discusses the wealth of benefits in the context of academic advising, it would makes sense that these benefits are not limited to advising sessions but could be applied to other areas of student affairs. Advising is a crucial factor in first year students' experience, yet most institutions' advising departments are understaffed and overwhelmed (Hart, 1995). Advising fosters students' connections to their

institutions. This benefit is of such importance that it cannot afford to be lost due to overwhelmed staff. As such, institutions should ensure that each student receives personal contact from university personnel without relying solely on advisors to do so. While student affairs professionals do not possess the same advising competencies that trained advisors do, they can assist in reaching out to students, helping them identify challenges, and creating plans for overcoming them. While it is not the job of student affairs professionals to register students for courses, if these professionals implemented such a strategy, it would help the institution identify the students requiring the most assistance (in which case these students could be referred to their advisor) while serving to lessen the case load of advisors. Because most housing professionals are already required to reach out to students during the first six week of a semester, they have an excellent opportunity to make early contacts.

Originally, residence halls embodied ideals of university personnel guiding the development of students. In fact, some of the initial efforts focused on first year student support extends from the idea of segregating freshmen into dormitories where advisors would reside alongside them and help guide their development (Gordon, 1989). Since colonial times, residence halls have evolved into complex support systems that include a variety of academic support initiatives. These efforts have included learning communities, residence hall academic resource centers, and meetings between residence hall staff and first year students. Residence halls are an ideal place to look at implementing intrusive contacts due to the amount of time students and staffs spend there. Astin believed that residential students have an increased chance over commuter students to create identification and attachment to undergraduate life because they sleep, eat, and spend all their hours on campus (Astin, 1984). His research revealed that living in the residence halls increases students' persistence by 12 percent (as cited in Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Hart's (1995) research revealed that students living on campus spend as much as 70 hours a week, out of 168 available, engaged within their residence hall environment.

Residence halls have also been revealed to positively impact students' grades, psychosocial development, self-esteem, critical thinking, involvement, persistence, and satisfaction with the institution (Johnson & Cavins, 1996). Other research has shown that these benefits are increased when students participate in learning communities, or "residential education units that are organized on the basis of an academic theme or approach intended to integrate academic learning and community living" (Kennedy & Ishler, 2008, 126). The

explanation to these benefits lies in students having increased accessibility to campus resources and involvement opportunities (Astin, 1984). Students living on campus are more likely to interact with faculty, to get involved with student government, and to participate in Greek life (Astin, 1984).

The residence halls are an ideal place for the incorporation of intrusive advising for several reasons. Professional advisors are overwhelmed with the amount of students assigned to them, which restricts the quality and quantity of their interactions. As such, if residence hall personnel begin incorporating advising outreaches in their areas they can help alleviate the advising load of professional advisors. Another reason is that the overall goals of residence hall staff include helping first year students make connections, work through transitions, identify and pursue academic and career goals, and support classroom initiatives (Mosier, 1991). These goals are aligned with the intrusive advising approach and philosophy. Also, many professionals already have some form of programming in place spanning the first six weeks students are on campus. This time period is critical to the successful transition of first year students, and most residence halls require their staffs to have made some form of contact with each resident during this time. Because professional staffs members already reach out to these students and generate programs aimed at facilitating the topics typically covered during an intrusive advising appointment, it makes sense that residence halls could incorporate intrusive advising elements.

While intrusive contacts are relatively new to the residence hall context, several universities have integrated them in their halls. These institutions have seen the impact and success of incorporating an intrusive model with their students. These universities include Miami University, Western Kentucky University, University of South Carolina, and Kansas State University.

**Miami University**

Miami University in Oxford, Ohio is unique in that it has combined the traditional responsibilities of hall directors to include academic advising for all their first year students. Advising at Miami University is defined as the "process of enabling a student to gather information about University resources and program requirements, to develop competencies in course registration, to explore appropriate educational and career objectives, and to identify the implications of educational choices" (Rudge, 1999). Advising begins at a summer orientation where 95 percent of first year students learn about the Miami Plan. This plan helps familiarize

students with the mission and culture of Miami University as well as the general requirements of their academic program. Miami's program models how to make contact with first year students starting at orientation and continuing throughout their first year.

Advising in the residence halls is successful because first year students are introduced to it early on in orientation and meet their advisor the first week of school during their mandatory floor meetings (T. Barlage, personal communication, November 8, 2012). The advisors contact students through email as early as September asking students to discuss their transition and spring course selection. The advisors will attempt three points of contact—email, notes on their room door, and Resident Assistant contact. These attempts have a 95 percent success rate. The other five percent who do not respond to these contacts are most often offspring of faculty members or legacy students whose parents attended the institution. Those who do respond set up an hour appointment with the advisor and discuss fall transitions, academic program interests, campus involvement, family and friend support, roommate issues, and their relationship with their Resident Assistant. These meetings seek to help students navigate registration, identify major and career interest, and resource referrals.

What is unique to Miami is that administration places restrictions on the amount of students assigned per advisor (T. Barlage, personal communication, November 8, 2012). Miami is home to 36 residence halls but even the largest hall has a 150 student per advisor ratio. For those halls housing more than 150 students, graduate assistants also live in and work as advisors to help even the advising cases among professionals. The philosophy behind this approach is that smaller advising caseloads create increased opportunities for personal connections that aid in retention. Miami believes that residence halls should be the location for advising first year students due to the proximity shared between students and personnel.

Any information gathered during these initial advising appointments is uploaded into Advisor Track, an online, centralized database system, that allows all university faculty and staff to view the content of these meetings. Advisor Track helps build collaborative outreaches to students by allowing faculty to know what challenges first year students are facing. Faculty members are also required to submit midterm grades. Students with a grade of "C-" or lower receive an email from their advisor that includes resources and recommendations for contacting their faculty to discuss their grades. Students with a grade lower than "D" are asked to meet with their advisor in person. Miami hosts 3,800 first year students and approximately 1,000 of them

will receive one of these forms of intervention.  Those who possess a 2.0 grade point average in the spring semester are placed on academic warning, which restricts students' accounts until they have met with an advisor to discuss strategies for improving their grades.

Another outstanding practice by Miami University is their training program for first year advisors.  Before assuming their responsibilities, all first year advisors are trained for a week and a half on topics that include using Advisor Track, keeping academic records, and advising methods.  They also discuss the importance of a liberal arts education and the academic departments' requirements so that advisors are able to appropriately answer students' questions.  First year advisors are then placed in advising scenarios with returning advisors acting as students so that new advisors get the opportunity to practice conducting an advising session.  Before facilitating their first advising appointment, new staff members are required to sit in on two different advising appointments with returners so they can get a feel for how the sessions go.

Tresa Barlage, the Assistant Director for Academic Initiatives, believes the Miami model is successful because it looks at the holistic nature of students and intrusively seeks to connect with them (personal communication, November 8, 2012).  The early contact provides opportunities to identify transitional issues and help resolve them.  It is also successful due to the reinforcement and priority it receives from upper-administration.  At Miami the Provost, Vice President of Student Affairs, and the President place an emphasis on the advising efforts aimed at first year students.  It is their belief that residence hall personnel are knowledgeable about what is going on with students and thus should be the ones advising them.  The upper-administration has cut down on the competition that occurs among departments by identifying each department's role in institutional retention efforts.  This support along with the intrusive efforts of residence hall personnel have led to a 90 percent retention rate of first year students.

**Western Kentucky University**

Western Kentucky University (WKU) in Bowling Green, Kentucky features a five-day program that extends intrusive contacts through informal and interactive gatherings featuring a range of topics from academic departments and student organizations.  This program is known as the MASTERS Plan, which stands for Making Academic and Social Transitions Educationally Rewarding (Western Kentucky University, 2012). The program is planned and facilitated through the Department of Residence Life and allows students to move into the residence halls early in order to meet other first year students and begin building connections.  It seeks to

familiarize students with the traditions and history of the institution so that students have an easier time integrating to the collegiate setting.

WKU employs a blended approach to intrusive contacts by combining orientation, advising, and housing efforts through the MASTERS Plan. MASTERS is in its 20th year of being implemented as an institutional persistence effort (B. Silliman, personal communication, November 1, 2012). It stands out as exemplary from other institutions because it offers a transitional workshop that seeks to help first year students establish connections to their peers, the institution, and the local community prior to the start of the semester. While it is a housing initiative, it solicits the involvement of a variety of stakeholders including deans, department chairs, faculty, admissions representatives, high school guidance counselors, local community members, and other student affairs staffs. Participation is not required but is considered advantageous for social and academic integration in the institution. The program typically enrolls 2,300 of WKU's 3,300 first year students. Eighty-five percent of the first year students who reside on campus choose to participate in the program.

While participating in the orientation students attend a variety of formal and informal presentations and socials that focus on introducing them to institutional expectations (B. Silliman, personal communication, November 1, 2012). Each day features a main event as well as informational presentations. Participants move through these sessions in pairings that include other students who live on their floors as well as students who live across campus so that they know both those closest to them and others who do not live in the halls. On the first day, students participate in Convocation, an event where students learn the institution's alma mater, Western Creed, the fight song, and receive their first red towel (an institutional tradition). At Convocation students begin learning about institutional traditions and expectations of them as first year students. Students also participate in a campus-wide scavenger hunt that helps them learn to navigate the campus and find resources. The second day students are invited to college luncheons hosted by their individual academic colleges. At these luncheons students have the opportunity to meet their faculty before the first day of class. They also receive general information, announcements, involvement opportunities, and advising updates from their college. The goal of the luncheons is to make faculty more approachable and students' first day of classes less intimidating. The third day hosts the Campus Festival where varying personnel showcase their talents. In the past this has included faculty members performing in bands and

Greek faculty members performing step shows.  The underlying idea is that students can make connection with personnel based on common interests.  The fourth day involves the Topper You program.  Topper You is a spirit competition where the teams face paint, design costumes, chant cheers, and more.  The Athletic Department attempts to evoke school spirit within participants and encourage their attendance at athletic events.  The fifth day brings an element of civic engagement where students participate in local volunteer opportunities in groups of 10 to 20.

The informational presentations are structured to respond to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (B. Silliman, personal communication, November 1, 2012).   The first day's presentations are aimed at survival skills and making successful transitions into institutional culture.  These topics include brief exposures to issues such as campus safety, sexual assault, alcohol, academic expectations, and diversity.  The second day is geared towards prepping participants to gain a sense of belonging by understanding their academic abilities and campus resources available to them as well as how to make connections with peers who are different from them.  The third day's sessions are focused on helping students make decisions that lead to success.  The topics include fiscal responsibility, time management, wellness issues, and drug and alcohol policies.  To support students' needs for belonging, the week host an involvement fair where students can interact with over 85 organizations and learn about opportunities to become involved.

The MASTERS Program is intrusive in nature for several reasons.  It begins with recruiting students through the institution's mandated orientation.  During this orientation, students and parents are informed by housing professionals about the opportunities and benefits of participating in the MASTERS program.  Housing professionals also make unsolicited contacts with admitted students by sending them pamphlets on residential information including the MASTERS program.  Another unique intrusion implemented by WKU is collaborating with high school guidance counselors to inform students about the MASTERS program.  All of these efforts are intrusive in the fact that they are unsolicited and early contacts that help respond to possible transitional issues.  The program also strives to provide repetitive exposure to peers, faculty, and local community members in the hopes that students will be able to make connections that they can utilize later in the semester should they struggle.

Assessment efforts over the program reveal a five percent increase in retention rates for students who participated and earned their degree within four years (B. Silliman, personal communication, November 1, 2012). This percentage increased to 11 percent for students who

participated and earned their degree in six years.  The program coordinator, Blair Silliman, believes the program is successful not only because it gives students the opportunity to understand what is expected of them but also because it crosses the divisional line usually existent between faculty and student affairs professionals.  The collaborative effort across the institution helps orient students to the entire university rather than one department or academic program.

**University of South Carolina**

The University of South Carolina (USC) takes a completely different approach in implementing intrusive contacts.  Rather than providing orientation workshops, USC spreads out their intrusive contacts over the first two semesters that first year students are on campus. University Housing seeks to create communities that foster the academic and personal development of its students (University of South Carolina, 2012).  In order to support this mission statement, University Housing began designing and implementing academic initiatives in its halls and apartments in order to increase student retention (A. Fink, personal communication, October 25, 2012).  In the mid-1990s, housing administrators and professional staff began building partnerships with faculty members to better serve the academic needs of its 6,500 residents.  Some of these programs included the Academic Centers for Excellence (ACE), Academic Interventions, and A-Chats.  Each of these programs applies unique intrusive contact methods that that have effectively furthered persistence and retention.

While the halls are not responsible for the provision of advising, they bring emphasis to academics through several initiatives (A. Fink, personal communication, October 25, 2012). ACE is a housing initiative with academic coaches that provides writing consultation, math tutoring, and academic coaching.  These services are strategically scattered throughout the residence halls.  Academic coaches help students develop study skills and overcome academic barriers.  Academic Interventions are another initiative designed for faculty of University 101, English 101, and other common first year courses to report student absences.  Faculty can utilize an online system to report these absences and then hall coordinators, graduate assistants, and resident mentors (RMs) will meet with these students to discover why they are struggling to attend courses.  At the end of the fall semester, housing is given a list of those students who are deemed academic deficient, or on the verge of academic dismissal.  These students are asked to meet with housing professionals to develop a plan in order to bring about academic

improvements. While professionals work with students to develop these plans, it is the responsibility of students to follow through and carry out these plans.

Dr. Fink, the Director of Residence Life at USC, believes the most effective intrusive strategy facilitated by University Housing is the A-Chats (personal communications, October 25, 2012). These are a series of one-on-one conversations initiated by RMs with all residents, regardless of classification, at predetermined times throughout the year. While a script guides these conversations, RMs are trained on how to approach and initiate conversations in a fluid manner. The questions are based on common transitional issues, such as homesickness and academics. The first meeting occurs in August or September. RMs open by asking about the student's USC experience, connections they have made with others, and school work. RMs ask students to identify their academic goals, the courses they are enrolled in, as well as helping students make connections with others who are enrolled in the same courses. The second meeting occurs mid-October and focuses on whether students are meeting their goals, identifying struggles, and referring to resources. The third meeting occurs in late January and the fourth occurs in April. The last two meetings are follow-ups on any transitional or academic concerns occurring. Additional meetings may occur if students possess failing grates at the end of the fall semester or are missing classes. All conversations are logged onto the departmental intraweb. Hall coordinators, faculty, and housing administrators have the ability to access these contacts and review them for common themes and problems faced by students.

Dr. Fink attributes the success of these initiatives to the collaboration and communication among all levels of student, professional, and faculty staff members (personal communication, October 25, 2012). The intraweb acts as a data collection source that helps administrators make more informed policy and programming decisions in addition to helping faculty better address curriculum and coursework problems. It also helps professional and student staff members take an individualized approach to the problems students are facing. It also serves to help streamline and link efforts between student affairs and academia retention efforts.

**Kansas State University**

My interest in first year persistence developed during my experience as an Assistant Residence Life Coordinator at Kansas State University. As part of my job I initiated intrusive contacts through a system known as Making Achievements Possible-Works (MAP-Works). MAP-Works is a non-confidential, self-report survey released to first year students the third

week of their first semester.  It surveys students on their academic behaviors, social integrations, and emotional competencies.  After answering a series of questions, the survey codes the student as red, yellow, or green based on the challenges experienced by the student that may make it hard for them to persist to their second year.  Students may be considered red if they came to college with low test scores or do not intend to return to the institution. Yellow students are those who warrant monitoring but may not require immediate attention.  Green students are those that have no present transitional issues. The results of the survey include a breakdown of all the areas students are excelling and experiencing challenges.  It also includes a list of resources and their contact information so that the student knows what services the institution provides.  Students and any university personnel connected to them may view these results.  Personnel can then make contact with students to follow up with the obstacles and challenges they are presently experiencing in order to connect them to institutional resources.

My residence hall houses approximately 300 freshmen students.  While the hall does not require participation with MAP-Works, it is highly encouraged.  The Vice President of Student Life emails all first year students the survey.  After a week residence hall staff and other personnel will send reminder emails to non-respondents.  Once students have completed the survey our paraprofessional hall staff, the Residence Life Coordinator, and myself review the results and begin making contact with students who are coded as red or yellow.  These contacts are initially made through emails; however, if no response occurs within a week, we will call students or stop by their rooms.  Once a meeting is set up we will print off their results and identify campus resources that would be most beneficial for the problems they are experiencing.

Most of the meetings I have with students relate to homesickness, academic behaviors, or financially difficulties.  During these conversations, students and I will discuss how their college and residence hall experiences are going.  I will ask if they feel that the results of the survey accurately demonstrate their present experience.  I also ask them if they are aware of campus resources or if they have used them before.  Through these conversations, the students and I collaboratively identify the challenges they are facing as well as ways to resolve them.  I ask students to identify several things they can begin doing differently in order to overcome the challenges they are facing.  I then set a follow-up meeting where I will ask how these strategies are going.

Some of the most obvious benefits of these meetings have included making students aware of resources and identifying alternative strategies to overcome academic and social barriers. Other benefits include building rapport between students and personnel so that if students find they are struggling later on they know whom they can turn to for help. As Tinto's research suggests, these early contacts can help students feel cared about which is significantly impactful in students' decisions to persist (2001).

## Conclusion

**Summary of Best Practices**

After reviewing the current intrusive models of Miami University, Western Kentucky University, and University of South Carolina, it is clear that successful intrusive contacts in the residence halls must be a shared commitment across campus. This commitment should be demonstrated and reinforced through the appropriate distribution of funding, resources, and restructuring of personnel time. These efforts are built upon collaboration between academic departments and student affairs. Each of these institutions has communicated the role and expectations of each department as it relates to retention. These initiatives have frequently come from the highest administrator positions within an institution because these people have the power to support initiatives and to restructure responsibilities. In addition to commitment and collaboration, these schools have all built their intrusive retention efforts on sound developmental theory in the context of their individual, institutional needs. More often than not, these schools began the development of their program by collaborating with their personnel who had the most student interactions so as to know what their students' needs were. These institutions were very thorough in the development of their plan and the delegation of responsibilities. Their plans were comprehensive in identifying the frequency of contact, the type of contact, and the staff involved in contact. While many other things could be added to this list, these components made for the successful implementation of intrusive models within their residence halls.

**Challenges of Intrusive Contacts**

While intrusive contact programs have multiple benefits, they do come with some challenges and criticisms. The challenge in implementing successful intrusive contacts is that although personnel are reaching out to students, students may not respond to these intrusions. In that sense, intrusive contacts are only as successful as students allow. If students fail to enroll in

MASTERS, refuse to have an A-Chat with their Resident Mentor, or ignore the MAP-Works survey request, they will fail to reap the benefits of intrusive contacts.

Students and personnel who object to intrusive contacts may do so for the same reasons. Upon arriving to campus, some students feel a strong sense of independence and do not want personnel "checking in" on their progress. Some students may believe they are being treated as though they are in high school. While this perspective may be true in the initial implementation of retention strategies, students' objections to intrusive contacts seem to weaken once they have become embedded in the institutional culture (J. Murray, personal communication, October 25, 2012).

Some higher education personnel believe students should be responsible for seeking the help they need, thus they may believe it is not their right to intrude in students' lives. When University Housing at USC first began their A-Chat initiative, personnel were the most resistant to the new program (A. Fink, personal communication, October 25, 2012). These housing personnel felt that it was not their place to initiate so many contacts centered on an academic focus. While intrusive advising does initiate unsought contact and attempts to help students through their first year experience, its purpose is not to hand-hold. Rather this approach is to be implemented from the stance that personnel are working with first year students to develop decision making and problem solving skills so that as these students progress throughout their college career, they will be able to do so on their own without as much intrusion from personnel.

Personnel may also object to the amount of time it requires. Intrusive contacts, especially if the first few are not responded to, take an extensive amount of time and energy. While staff may believe in the benefits of such contacts, they may not wish to exert the effort it takes to successfully facilitate them. Another objection exists in the word "intrusive." Many students and personnel first reaction to the concept of intrusive contacts or advising include raised eyebrows and confusion about why personnel would intrude in the private lives of students. Intrusive is a word with a negative connotation, which many universities are renaming as appreciative inquiry or intentional contacts so that they may incorporate the benefits but under a different vernacular.

Administrators who are committed to utilizing intrusive contacts as a strategy for retention should consider restructuring personnel responsibilities so as to accommodate for this new time commitment. Personnel cannot be expected to tackle new responsibilities and engage

in follow-ups and other meetings without other responsibilities shifting or without hiring more personnel. Those schools who are serious in their implementation of intrusive models will either need to supply additional staff to meet this new need or will need to restructure their current staffing so that they have appropriate time to implement effective contacts and follow ups.

Gaining faculty involvement can be another hindrance to effective intrusive contacts. It is necessary to have the support and involvement of faculty so that personnel can reach out to students who are struggling. While each institutions is different, Blair Silliman proposes that universities restructure their tenure requirements so that collaborative efforts between faculty and student affairs personnel can count towards faculty's tenure-related service requirements (personal communication, November 1, 2012). Silliman typically writes to the heads of academic departments in appreciation of faculty involvement. She also encourages involving faculty members very early on in the design and development of intrusive programs. These are a few strategies that may influence faculty's willingness to participate with such models.

Intrusive contacts can be hard to measure and evaluate for learning outcomes. As administrators seek to understand their department's impact on retention, personnel will need to possess the ability to demonstrate the impact their programs are having in terms of quantitative data. While it is true that many institutions that are currently implementing intrusive contacts have seen an increase in retention, it is hard to measure the impact of intrusive contacts isolated from other institutional initiatives. As such, personnel may object to using intrusive contacts because it cannot be easily measured for results and impact.

**Future Research**

While much research exists on the factors that contribute to student attrition, additional research is needed in regards to the effectiveness of efforts made by personnel to retain students. More research is needed to understand the environmental and procedural impacts on students' decision to leave. Most of the existing research is quantitative in nature and institutional specific. As researchers continue to solve the retention riddle, they will need to expand the literature to include qualitative studies as well as the inclusion of multiple institutions. It may be useful for administrators to understand what students who opt not to persist are deciding to do instead. This information could perhaps lead to better support services.

Beyond the expansion of factors examined, research is needed to understand the relationship experienced between advising, residence halls, and students. While research shows

that advising is effective, not much research has been conducted in whether advising methods applied to other student affairs contexts results in the same benefits. Research should also seek to examine the job responsibilities of hall professional staffs and which responsibilities share a relationship with persistence. Administrators should possess a full understanding of the impact staff's daily responsibilities have on retention. The research should include input from personnel, administrators, faculty, and students because retention is something that impacts each of these roles.

**Creating Change**

Advising initiatives are only as effective as the theories they are built on, the environmental and procedural support they receive, as well as the competencies of the personnel implementing them (Miller & McCaffrey, 1982). While intrusive contacts and the theories motivating them have been shown to help increase retention, higher education looking to reap the rewards of intrusive contacts must prepare their campuses first. Institutions must be willing to reexamine their policies and practices to incorporate holistic elements so that students are supported academically, socially, and personally (Reason et al., 2006). This could mean a shift in the responsibilities or approach taken by various support offices. Student affairs offices have become so narrowly tailored to the provision of one service towards one demographic that the "whole student" is neglected in the process (Hart, 1995). Administrators need to make commitments to intrusive contacts through policy revisions, financial allotments, and training of personnel. They must also clearly define the purpose of intrusive contacts in relation to the university's and department's missions (Ender et al., 1982).

Administrators should also seek out qualified personnel who possess the abilities to initiate, establish, and maintain relationships with students (Ender & Winston, 1982). In addition to these abilities, staff should possess a basic knowledge about the developmental stages and tasks of freshmen as well as the institutional resources available to students. Personnel should not be assumed to be proficient in these skills upon hiring, rather institutions serious in their commitments to intrusive contacts should provide training in basic communication skills and mentoring relationships.

When seeking to incorporate intrusive elements, administrators should first seek the opinion of those personnel who have the most daily contact with first year students in order to identify common themes or issues occurring among this demographic (J. Murray, personal

communication, October 25, 2012). Once issues are clearly identified, a plan should be devised to address them. This planning should occur across multiple departments, span the higher education hierarchy, and include input from both student affairs and academia personnel. Each department should be aware of the mission and initiatives of the others so as to effectively serve students and reduce the amount of duplicate services. The most effective programs are those that have built collaborative partnerships between faculty and student affairs staff. In order for student affairs to gain the involvement of faculty they will need to learn to speak in terms of data (B. Silliman, personal communication, November 1, 2012). Once student affairs personnel can communicate the direct outcomes of their retention programs, they will be more likely to gain faculty support necessary for the success of their efforts. These efforts will allow all personnel to understand their roles and responsibilities in furthering their university's retention efforts.

Just as important as personnel understanding their responsibilities towards retention is freshmen understanding what institutions expect of them. Institutions should seek to communicate with freshmen students early on about the commitment they can expect from personnel and the forms that intrusive contacts may take. This communication could be relayed via admissions materials or during orientations. Because students' expectations play a pivotal role in their ability to successfully transition to collegiate demands, it is imperative that institutions begin communicating what freshmen can expect from them early on so students are well prepared to make appropriate adjustments.

Students no longer have the right to fail as they did in previous years. Due to faltering funding, personnel are required to demonstrate accountability towards their efforts in graduating students. These factors have brought about a new motto in students services: "we must do everything we can to retain students and get them graduated even if it means intervening in students' lives and helping them identify problems early on" (J. Murray, personal communication, October 25, 2012). Cohen and Jody (1978) recommend that administrators shift from a passive to assertive attitude when it comes to guiding students. In order to meet students where they are at when they arrive on campus, a change in philosophical approach towards providing student services is necessary. Students should no longer be responsible for navigating the campus and its resources independently, rather the burden of student success should rest both on the individual and personnel and faculty. Intrusive contacts respond the low adult orientation characteristics that many of today's students possess; however, personnel must be wiling to

invest the time and effort and assert their services into students' lives. While it is university personnel's responsibility to meet students where they are at when they arrive on campus, it is every institution's hope that students do not leave the same as when they arrived (K. Cook, personal communication, November 1, 2012).

There is no research that demonstrates the definitive impact of advising as it relates to retention; however, it does suggest that advising impacts students' involvement that in turn affects student retention. This paper has revealed the impact and success that several institutions are experiencing with intrusive contacts. These contacts respond to the characteristics of today's students as well as many of the factors that attribute to attrition. Their implementation should not be confined within an advising office; rather housing professionals should seek to incorporate intrusive contacts in their halls. By initiating these early, unsolicited contacts, housing professionals can identify and respond to obstacles prior to situations becoming too overwhelming for students to handle. The implementation of such initiatives should not be underestimated, yet neither should the benefits. Difficult economic and retention times calls for new approaches and a willingness by staffs to implement effective retention strategies in their areas. Because intrusive contacts build connections, identify problems, highlight campus resources, and address transitional issues they helps resolve most factors that attribute to first year attrition and thus emerges as a viable option for improving retention rates.

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