

# The SDES Connection

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## A Bridge Between Civilizations: SDES Launches Global Initiative

A group of 19, including UCF faculty, Student Development and Enrollment Services (SDES) staff: Pat Pates, Patti MacKown, Laine Powell, Charlene Stinard and Caroline Willard, and community members, traveled to Istanbul, Turkey. This ancient city of Constantinople is located on the border of two continents, Asia and Europe.

Inspired by participation in the 2006 Faculty Development Conference hosted by the Office of Diversity Initiatives, a relationship was developed with Olcay Kurson, UCF Computer Science, and other UCF faculty from Turkey. They extended an invitation to conference participants to participate in a travel grant sponsored by the Nile Foundation for Intercultural Dialog and Peace.

The goal was to share the UCF experience at higher education institutions in Turkey and cultivate international relationships to develop globally competent student leaders and foster understanding, respect and appreciation for an important global community. Global or intercultural competence assists students to interact effectively and meaningfully with others whose backgrounds are different from their own. This is a critical skill for successful professional development in the diversified world in which we live. One of the SDES strategic plan action items seeks to engage the division in this area, "Provide experiences to assist staff and students to develop awareness and cultural competency as productive and contributing members of a diverse and global community."

The Nile foundation, established in 2003, is a non-profit organization whose purpose

is to unite global communities through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. They share the differences and similarities in cultures and religions in an effort to achieve world peace in the foreseeable future. The Nile Foundation organizes these trips, "Bridge Between Civilizations: Trip to Turkey," each year. The goal is to involve university and community professionals as well as students to participate in intercultural dialog.

The August 7-17 trip was an intensive tour of four areas in northwestern Turkey—Istanbul, Konya, Antalya and Izmir. The experiences can best be described in the words of some of the participants.

According to Patti MacKown, "This trip was an experience in cultural sharing that went beyond all expectations. Not only did I have the opportunity to experience the history of one of the most interesting parts of civilization by traveling to many sites, but I had the unique experience to interact with the Turkish people. True cultural exchange, not just the polite passing word, was part of the nightly dinners that I experienced. Hearing from Turkish families of their challenges and opportunities made cultural exchange a springboard for cultural change as we compared ideas for solutions. Visits to the universities were informative in allowing me to see the differences and similarities that all students face."

Laine Powell's reflections are equally profound, "I've traveled abroad before, but never experienced the warmth and hospitality as I did from the Turkish people. I walked away from this experience knowing more about Judaism, Christianity and Islam than I could ever get from a textbook or by watching CNN. What we experienced was real. It was truly an experience to hear opinions from the Turkish people about Americans. For example, some families believed that Americans had an abundant amount of cash flow and didn't understand why poverty existed in the U.S. Others believed that Americans were talented when it came to sports and



The UCF group was invited to a welcome dinner cruise on the Bosphorus Strait that flows between Europe and Asia. Left to right: SDES Staff, Laine Powell, Patti MacKown, Charlene Stinard, Pat Pates and Caroline Willard.

entertainment, but not art or furniture design—they believed we lagged behind Europeans (significantly) and wondered why our schools were not producing artists. Our nightly dinners (seven course meals) involved heavy discussion about race, religion and politics."

Pat Pates sums up her experiences in the words of the great Turkish scholar, Rumi. "What I learned from the Turkish people is encapsulated in a well-known Rumi quotation, 'Be so tolerant that your heart becomes wide like the ocean. Become inspired with faith and love of human beings. Let there be no troubled souls to whom you do not offer a hand, and about whom you remain unconcerned.' If you ever have the opportunity to participate in a Nile Foundation trip—take it. It will be a life-transforming global initiative."



The UCF group met with staff at Bosphorus University, Istanbul. UCF has recently signed an international partner agreement with this university.



Hagia Sophia, built in 537 A.D. by Byzantine Emperor Justinian was considered the greatest church in Christendom before St. Peter's Basilica was built a thousand years later.

# A Winning Duo for Retention: Data Mining and Academic Advising

The First-Time-in-College (FTIC) retention rate at the University of Central Florida rose from 70 percent in 1994 to 83 percent in 2002, and has remained at the same level for several years. Current interventions by first-year advisors target approximately 3,950 students. The Student Development and Enrollment Services' offices of Assessment and Planning and the Student Success Center, along with faculty from the Statistics Department, collaborated to identify 1,000 First-Time-In College

(FTIC) students who would most likely not progress to their sophomore year using the pioneering statistical technique, "data mining."

In a departure from the traditional method of selecting at-risk groups of students to work with, data mining indicates the probability of not being retained for each student. Once the students in greatest need of intervention are identified, advisors can provide academic guidance and innovative

outreach programming specifically designed for these students.

Data mining is the most robust tool available to determine correlations in datasets with many diverse variables, and subsequently, allows for more precise targeting of interventions. Because of data mining's precision, this method is more productive and cost effective than traditional approaches.

## Why is Retention Important?

Generally, student retention is reported as the percentage of a freshman class cohort that returns to begin their sophomore year. But retention is more than just a statistical measurement. The lifetime earning potential of an American citizen increases with higher educational achievement and degree earned. Retention is also used as a measure of academic excellence. *U.S. News & World Report* uses retention as one of its criteria to rank the academic excellence of U.S. national universities and liberal arts colleges.

Finally, for universities and colleges, as in many businesses, keeping existing customers costs less than acquiring new customers. In times of tight state education budgets, saving money by retaining enrolled students can be critical for universities. For example, the University of Alabama loses \$1 million annually for every 100 students that drop out (Hardin, M. 2005).



Knight Success Program (KSP) Premiere Knight: Students were given an overview of KSP and the opportunity to meet their academic advisor and review issues they were experiencing.

## Knight Success Program

Using the data mining techniques, probability of not being retained values were calculated for each of the 6,340 FTICs entering UCF in fall 2005. After these values were determined, 1,000 students with the greatest probability of not being retained were targeted for special advising, outreach and intervention efforts. These efforts evolved into the Knight Success Program (KSP).

The KSP provides academic advising and support services through the Student Success Center and Academic Development and Retention, which consist of the following first-year advising offices: First Year Advising and Exploration, Student Academic Resource Center, Transfer and Transition Services, Multicultural Academic and Student Services, and Academic Services for Student-Athletes. The KSP strives to connect students with advisors who play active roles in the first-year experience.

Various communication tools were utilized to contact the 1,000 students identified to participate in the first year of the KSP. These tools included letters, phone calls from Peer Mentors and e-mails. Once contacted, students were encouraged to participate in the program and given an overview of its services and benefits.

## Knight Success Program Components

### College Student Inventory

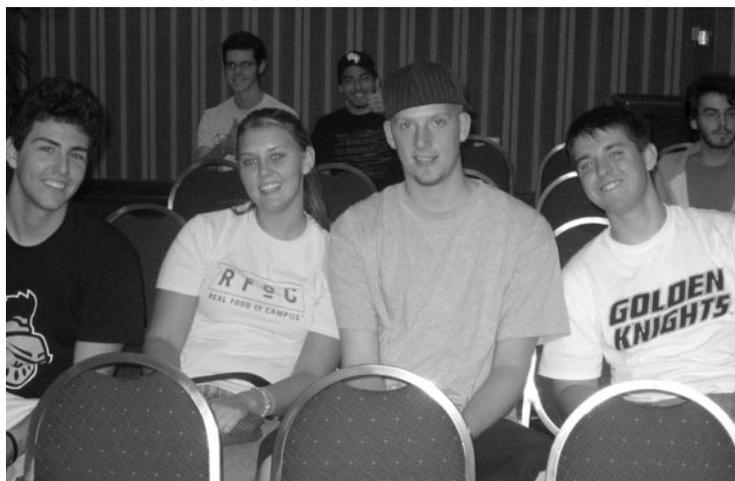
Students had an opportunity to complete the College Student Inventory (CSI), designed by Noel-Levitz. This instrument asked students to respond to a series of statements that purportedly tap key cognitive and affective indicators of potential attrition. Students answer using a seven-point Likert scale with choices ranging from “not at all true” to “completely true.” Advisors then utilized information from the CSI to assist students during a 30-minute advising appointment.

### Partnerships

To encourage students to complete the CSI and to attend an academic advising appointment, a partnership with the UCF Bookstore and Housing and Residence Life was established to provide students with incentives and rewards for participation. The Bookstore provided \$5 gift cards and Housing and Residence Life provided 500 points in LINK (Learning and Interacting with New Knights) Loot. LINK is a freshman program that provides support to a variety of academic, social and developmental programs that assist FTIC students as they transition to the university. Students who attend these programs can receive LINK Loot that can be exchanged at an auction at the end of the semester for prizes, such as computers, tuition, iPods and software.

### Academic Advising and Peer Mentors

In addition to the opportunity to take the CSI, students received academic advising, connections to academic support services such as tutoring and Supplemental Instruction, and academic success workshops. They also received information on how to choose a major, connections to on-campus resources and other outreach programs. Finally, because of their closeness in age and familiarity with student life, Peer Mentors were used to establish strong connections with first-year students.



**Movie Knight:** Students were able to vote on which movie they wanted to see. The choices were the Blair Witch Project, The Shining, and Psycho (which received the most votes.) At Movie Knight, students were offered the opportunity to meet with their academic advisor.

### Freshman Seminar

To maximize students’ potential for retention, KSP worked collaboratively with the director of the Freshman Seminar Course (SLS 1501), to reserve two sections of the class in spring 2006 for KSP students on academic probation. SLS 1501 focuses on freshman transition issues and encourages academic success and retention.

### Initial Outcomes

Of the various program components offered during the fall and spring terms, results show that 85 percent of KSP students connected with an academic advisor during the year, whereas only 78 percent of first-year students not enrolled in KSP connected with an academic advisor.

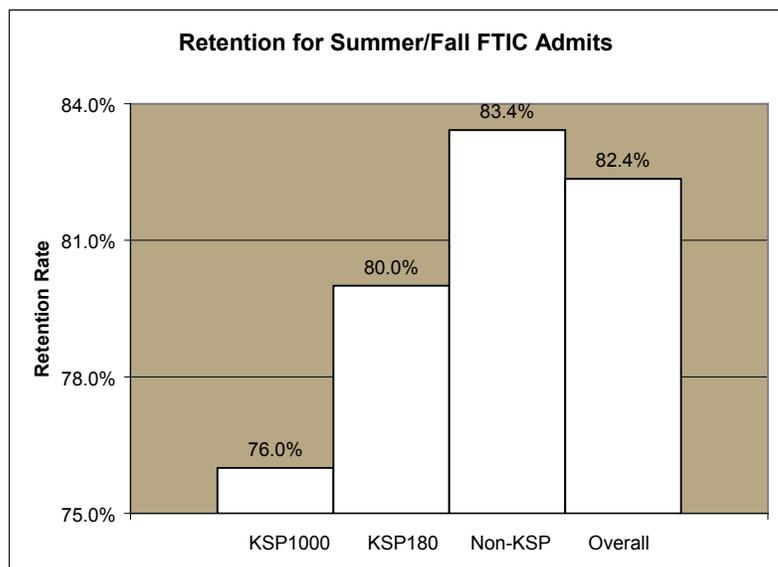
In addition, as Table 1 indicates, the retention rate for the KSP group was five percentage points (80% versus 75.1%) above the other 800 students who did not participate in the KSP. The retention rates of both the 1,000 at-risk students (76%) and KSP students (80%) were below that of the average freshmen retention rate of 83% and only reinforces that this is a high-risk group.

### Conclusion

The use of data mining to identify incoming UCF freshmen that are at risk of not being retained to their sophomore year applies cutting-edge technology to a problem that has plagued student affairs’ officers and institutions of higher education for over 25 years. However, it’s not enough to accurately identify the students who will not return the following year, but with concentrated effort, faculty and staff can connect to students, meet their needs and help them succeed in attaining a college degree.

At UCF, the Knight Success Program is a collaborative effort of many university departments which provide students the necessary personal and academic support needed to reach their goals.

Table 1



# AOD and Psychology Partner to Study Alcohol for Education and Prevention

SDES Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Programming (AOD) and Michael Dunn, associate professor in the psychology department who runs a research lab called Substance Use Research Group (SURG), have partnered to create empirically validated approaches to reduce risky alcohol use among college students.

One of the results of this collaboration is the availability of a wide range of services for UCF students. Six clinical psychology doctoral students, supported by the AOD office, are working to complete their research projects by offering the following: intervention services for mandated students, brief therapy for students voluntarily seeking services related to substance use, the administration of substance abuse assessments, and referrals for treatment.

“By supporting these doctoral students, AOD benefits from their expertise and research projects. In turn, the doctoral students have the opportunity to apply their knowledge in a meaningful way,” said Tom Hall, director of AOD.

Jackie Alfonso, one of the six students, has focused her doctoral dissertation on comparing several research-based approaches to see which alcohol intervention works best in reducing the likelihood of future risky alcohol use in “mandated” students. Mandated students are referred by the Office of Student Conduct and other agencies for assessment due to underage drinking or receiving a DUI. Alfonso will be comparing brief individual, group and electronically delivered intervention formats to see which works best to reduce alcohol consumption and related negative consequences in a mandated student population.

This study began in summer 2006 and will continue through spring 2007. Alfonso was able to recruit 30 students for the pilot project (pre-study data) over summer B and reported positive feedback from students. Results confirmed the students were genuinely pleased and often pleasantly surprised after completing their brief intervention. Alfonso’s aim is to provide students with personalized information on their risk, and to assist them in balancing the scale toward more protective factors, minimizing the risks related to alcohol use.

“Our approach is non-judgmental in nature, which may be a reason students are surprised when not receiving the ‘I told you so’ that they are likely to expect,” said Alfonso. “The approach credits students with being in charge of their life decisions...by educating students about themselves

and about a variety of alcohol information, we empower them to make better decisions.”

Janani Sivasithamparam, who is known as Jenn Siva, is also a doctoral student working with AOD. Siva has created a thesis project that involves

implementing and evaluating a research-based program for alcohol education designed for college students, called the “Classroom Based Expectancy Challenge.” The most recent version of the Expectancy Challenge was implemented and validated in SURG, where results showed participation in this program could successfully lead to decreased alcohol consumption in heavy drinking college students. This research also began in summer 2006 and will continue through spring 2007.

“My task is to modify the program to occur in a classroom setting and in a single session, with regular college students (as opposed to heavy drinkers),” Siva said. “If successful, the classroom-based version of Expectancy Challenge can be incorporated into course syllabi and used on a wide scale basis to help prevent the occurrence of problematic drinking behavior in college students.”

According to Dunn, “Several classes of students at UCF are participating [in the project] and receiving the state-of-the-art alcohol education curriculum as a benefit.” Siva’s project will evaluate the impact of the curriculum on these UCF students by assessing several variables, including risky behavior related to alcohol use and cognitive variables that are thought to be causal in determining various use patterns.

Another doctoral student is Pamela Brown, who is conducting a study that looks at Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) expectancies in memory relative to actual GHB use among UCF students. The study is a first step in the application of expectancy-based strategies to reduce GHB use. According to Dunn, “this is a foundational, theoretical project that will form the basis of development of new prevention and intervention strategies for college students to reduce use of GHB.”

GHB has become a popular drug of abuse among young adults due to its euphoric effects, its easy manufacture, low cost and the ease of access, especially in proximity to college campuses (National Drug Intelligence Center [NDIC], 2003). While under the influence of GHB, people typically report experiencing desirable feelings similar to alcohol intoxication including euphoria, tranquility, increased libido, reduction in social inhibition, and an overall sense of well-being (Bialer, 2002; Nicholson, & Balster, 2001). The adverse effects of this substance have become more renowned as incidents from accidental overdoses or complications from its use in combination with alcohol have increased among those individuals age 18 to 25 years old (SAMHSA, 2003). A critical factor contributing the prevalence of these problems is the steady increase in availability of GHB nationwide since the year 2000, as reported by the U.S. Department of Justice (2003).

“Although attempts to reduce club drug use, including GHB, have become very common on college campuses, current prevention strategies have been disappointing,” said Brown. “This underscores the necessity of new efforts to develop theory-based approaches to prevention of GHB use if substantial reductions in the prevalence of this drug are to be achieved.”



Left to right: Jenn Siva, Pamela Brown, Toni Shelton and Jacqueline Alfonso are from the Substance Use Research Group

