



Teaching Toolkit: Promising Practices for Undergraduate Success

Introduction

The role of faculty and instructors in creating and sustaining exceptional learning opportunities is critical to achieving UNC’s ambitious goals for student success. This toolkit includes a snapshot of UNC’s undergraduates followed by an overview of six promising practices that instructors can use in their classrooms to support student success. The undergraduate snapshot is useful for understanding the experiences, goals, and interests of our students from pre-matriculation to early post-baccalaureate outcomes. The promising practices are strategies that instructors can begin incorporating into their classes immediately.

Contents

Introduction	1
2020 Student Snapshot.....	2
What is the impact of Covid-19 on UNC’s students?.....	2
Covid-19 survey highlights	2
Who enrolls at UNC?.....	2
What outcomes and experiences do students have while enrolled?.....	4
What do we know about UNC students who leave before graduating?	5
What do we know about students’ experience after graduation?.....	6
Data Sources	7
Promising Practices.....	8
Taking Attendance	8
Implementing Early Low-Stakes Assessment.....	9
Providing Low-Cost/No-Cost Textbook Options	10
Being Available	11
Completing UNC Progress Reports	11
Working with Student Outreach & Support (SOS).....	11
Resources.....	12

2020 Student Snapshot

Each fall, the Office of Assessment compiles a snapshot of the most recent data describing UNC's students. The 2020 Student Snapshot weaves together data from a variety of sources to better understand University of Northern Colorado students and their experiences from matriculation to post-graduation. This year, the snapshot includes information about the impact of Covid-19 on UNC's incoming and continuing students. A list of the complete data reports used for this summary is provided at the end of the document, and these reports are available upon request.

What is the impact of Covid-19 on UNC's students?

Over the spring and summer, UNC surveyed incoming and continuing students about their experiences with remote learning, barriers they encountered, and the kinds of support they anticipate needing if UNC must transition to fully online instruction. Challenges reported include financial pressures, issues with technology, lack of experience with or preparation for being online learners, inconsistent or insufficient contact and communication with instructors and advisors, and feeling disconnected from other students. Technology, financial aid, tutoring, and mental health services were among the most frequently cited types of support students think they will need this fall.

Students enrolling in fall 2020 will need support and guidance on how to manage their own learning in an online environment, including time management, using Canvas, and staying engaged with instructors, course materials, and their peers. The transition from high school to college is challenging in the best of times. Fall 2020 first-time, first-year students are likely to need even more guidance about how to be successful in their classes, as well as referrals to the appropriate support offices. A variety of resources for faculty on helping students be successful in online learning environments is available from [The Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning \(CETL\)](#) and [Instructional Design and Development \(IDD\)](#).

Covid-19 survey highlights

- For many students, their first experience with online learning occurred in spring 2020 when high schools and colleges had to quickly pivot from in-person to remote instruction (94% of incoming students and 54% of continuing students).
- 82% of the incoming students said that learning online was more difficult relative to classroom instruction.
- While some students reported being more comfortable or prepared for future online learning, significant percentages of students are not prepared to be successful without support. 45% of incoming students are either somewhat prepared or not at all prepared. 32% of continuing students say they will need significant support.
 - Students with lower GPAs, underrepresented minority students, and students in HSS, NHS, and PVA reported higher anticipated needs for support.

Who enrolls at UNC?

There is no single profile of the typical UNC student; however, there are several factors that can contribute to understanding the students who enroll.

- Our students want to be here; UNC is the top choice of 72% of the students who enroll.
- UNC fulfills its mission as a public university, with Colorado residents comprising 84.3% of

- UNC's undergraduates. 7.3% are from states in the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), and 8.4% are non-resident, non-WUE.
- UNC enrolls a higher proportion of students who are traditionally underserved in higher education compared to the other doctoral research universities in the state.
 - UNC serves a large proportion of underrepresented minority students. Only UC Denver is more diverse (26% compared to 24% for UNC). The School of Mines enrolls 9% students from underrepresented minority groups, UC Boulder enrolls 13%, CSU enrolls 15%, and UC Colorado Springs enrolls 22%.
 - According to the Colorado Department of Higher Education, UNC's enrollment of underrepresented minority students more than doubled (15% to 31%) between 2008 and 2018.
 - Based on preliminary enrollment data, 37% of incoming freshmen identify as underrepresented minorities; Hispanic or LatinX students comprise the largest proportion of these students (64%), followed by Black or African American students (14%), and multiracial students (14%).
 - 35% of UNC freshmen are Pell-eligible compared to 12% at the School of Mines, 15% at UC Boulder, 20% at CSU, and 30% at UC Colorado Springs. Only UC Denver enrolls more Pell-eligible freshmen than UNC at 38%.
 - UNC is the highest ranked public Colorado four-year institution on the [Social Mobility Index](#) and is in the top 25% of all institutions included in the rankings. The index ranks colleges and universities based on the proportion of low-income students they enroll and how many students graduate into well-paying jobs.
 - Students enter with several assets.
 - Nearly all first-year undergraduate students (91%) feel confident in their ability to contribute to the well-being of their community (which has historically been important to our entering students). On average, first-year students do impact their community by spending 2.6 hours/week engaging in community service or volunteer work.
 - Faculty who utilize community-based projects in their courses help to support students' development. Students who report being enrolled in more courses with community-based projects experience more positive outcomes on a range of engaged learning indicators (e.g., higher order learning, collaborative learning, supportive environment), and are more likely to feel satisfied with their experiences at UNC.
 - A large percent of first-year students report higher self-ratings compared to students at peer institutions on skills and dispositions appropriate for living and working in a diverse society. These skills and dispositions include resolving conflicts involving race, bias, discrimination, and prejudice and participating in constructive dialogue with someone who disagrees with them.
 - They enter with high aspirations; 45% plan to complete at least a master's degree in the future.
 - They also face significant barriers.
 - High school grade point average (GPA) is the strongest predictor of first term academic outcomes and persistence. In fall 2019, 22% of the new first-time full-time freshmen had high school GPAs below 3.00. Of these students, 49% were not ready for math and 29% were not ready for college-level English per state remedial definitions.
 - First-year students report higher rates of having been diagnosed with a disability compared to students at peer institutions; the majority of reported disabilities are mental health disorders (56%) and learning disabilities (31%).
 - They are more likely to spend significantly more hours per week commuting and working

for pay compared to students at peer institutions.

What outcomes and experiences do students have while enrolled?

The majority of students who persist through graduation report high levels of satisfaction with their college experience. Survey data, along with retention and graduation outcomes, suggest that students may have different experiences at UNC based on a variety of demographic and other characteristics.

- The overall fall-to-fall retention rate for first time, full-time students in fall 2019 was 72%; however, there are wide variations based on different student populations. For comparison purposes, retention rates at public 4-year institutions in the United States range from 65% to 97% with an average retention rate of 81%.
 - Significant retention gaps exist between students of color (68%) and non-students of color (75%); first generation students (66%) and non-first-generation students (77%); and Pell-eligible (69%) and non-Pell-eligible students (74%).
 - Students from the Fall 2018 cohort with the highest retention rate (81%) are not the first in their family to complete college, not Pell-eligible, and not members of underrepresented minority populations.
- Retention decreases as academic preparedness decreases; only 37% of students with a high school GPA below 3.0 persist into their fourth year. In contrast, students with a GPA over 3.0 are retained at 62% into their fourth year (a 25%-point gap).
- First generation students report working significantly more hours per week compared to non-first-generation students; 40% of UNC's first-generation students worked 20 hours or more per week in the last year of college compared to 28% of non-first generation students.
- The number of students requesting accommodations through the Disability Resource Center has more than doubled over the last ten years.
 - Four disability categories account for 83% of requests for accommodations: Psychological (28%); Physical/Medical Disabilities (23%); Learning Disabilities (16%); and ADHD(16%).
 - In 2018-2019, the Disability Resource Center provided accommodated testing for approximately 1,100 students per semester.
- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of students report feeling comfortable with the climate at UNC; however, students have different experiences based on a variety of demographic characteristics.
 - First-generation low-income students are more likely to report being uncomfortable with the climate in their classes than non-first-generation students.
 - Female and transgender students are more likely than male students to indicate they've experience exclusionary, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.
 - Nearly one-third (31%) of students feel that faculty prejudice their abilities based on perceptions of their identity/background; first-generation, low-income, and male students reported feeling prejudged by faculty more often than their demographically opposite counterparts.
 - Students of color, low-income, and female students are all less likely to report feeling valued by UNC employees.
- Despite potential barriers, evidence suggests that with appropriate support, students at risk of attrition can be successful at UNC. However, not all students are willing to engage in help-seeking behaviors or are eligible for UNC's support programs.

- Nearly half of all first-year students Bears First participants (a program that serves academically underprepared students) indicated a reluctance to engage in help-seeking behaviors; common reasons included anxiety, shame, and a fear of feeling judged.
- Students who do participate in Bears First outperform their peers who were eligible but chose not to participate. Bears First participants were more likely to be retained after the fall semester (82% among Bears First participants vs. 69% among eligible, non-participants) and are less likely to be on academic probation as a result of their first semester grades (37% among Bears First participants vs. 52% among eligible, non-participants).
- Students who participate in TRIO and other specialized support programs are retained at significantly higher rates than other students; however, only about 12% of eligible students are served by these programs due to funding capacity.
- Students who take University 101, a first-year seminar focused on metacognitive learning development, are retained at a rate of 73% compared to a control group average of 70%.
- UNC has significant room for improvement in its graduation rates overall and by student demographic groups.
 - UNC's 4-year graduation rate is 31%, and its 6-year graduation rate is 52%. For comparison purposes, the average 6-year graduation rate among public 4-year institutions in the United States is 60%.
 - Similar to UNC's retention patterns among different demographic groups, significant gaps exist in graduation rates.
 - First generation students' six-year graduation rate is 46% compared to 56% for non-first-generation students.
 - 47% of students of color graduate in six years compared to 54% of non-students of color.
 - Only 47% of Pell-eligible students graduate in six years, compared to 55% of non-Pell-eligible students.

What do we know about UNC students who leave before graduating?

Students leave college without graduating for a variety of reasons, including decisions made before matriculation. Historically, between 25% and 30% of entering first-year students think there is a chance they will transfer before graduating. While students' initial intentions prove true for many students, they don't tell the whole story, as some of those who say they may transfer don't, and others who reported no likelihood of transferring in fact do leave prior to graduation.

- Students who decide not to return to UNC after completing one or more semesters cite a variety of reasons for this decision.
 - Transferring to another institution is the most frequently cited reason, reported by 49% of students in 2018.
 - Top reasons for transferring include affordability, academic program, proximity to home, sense of belonging, and campus life/city of Greeley.
 - Life events is the second most frequently cited reason, and this factor has steadily increased from 33% of students in 2014 to 42% in 2018.
 - Financial considerations are cited by 32% of students, followed by 25% who report leaving for academic reasons.
 - Students who left for academic reasons most frequently cited grades, perceived quality of instruction, and lost interest in degree programs.
 - Quality of instruction as a reason for leaving has increased steadily since 2014.
 - Between 2014 and 2018, exiting students consistently indicated a variety of social issues

- contributed to their decision to leave UNC, including fit at UNC, fit in Greeley, social lives on campus, and social lives in the community.
- Students who withdraw completely during a given semester also report a variety of reasons.
 - Life events is consistently the most frequently selected reason, accounting for 54% of respondents in 2018.
 - Transferring is the second most frequently cited reason at 29%, with academic (15%), medical (23%), and financial (23%) reasons also given by students.
 - Students intending to transfer cited affordability, academic programs, and proximity most often as the reasons for transferring.
 - Grades are the most frequently cited academic reason for withdrawing mid-semester.
 - Lack of interest in degree program, quality of academic advising, and quality of instruction are other academic reasons cited for withdrawing.
- Students who transfer and go on to graduate at other institutions are, with few exceptions, completing degrees in majors offered by UNC.
 - Among those who transfer and graduate from another institution, psychology is the degree most often completed, followed by nursing, biology, communication, and history.

What do we know about students' experience after graduation?

Survey data collected six-months after graduation suggest UNC graduates largely achieve career outcomes successes, but there are differences related to discipline and profession, with students in highly competitive, performance-based programs such as music, theatre, and the visual arts facing more challenges in their early career advancement.

- UNC graduates report high placement rates six months after graduation.
 - 88% of recent UNC undergraduates are placed within six-months of graduation, compared to 78% of Rocky Mountain region institutions, 82% from all public institutions, and 90% from the same Carnegie classification. Placed is defined as having obtained any employment, education, or service position.
 - 63% of recent UNC undergraduates are employed full-time within six months of graduation, compared to 47% from Rocky Mountain peers, 51% from all public institutions, and 60% from the same Carnegie classification.
 - On average, it takes UNC students two months to find employment following graduation.
- UNC graduates are contributing to Colorado's economy and applying their degrees to their careers.
 - Of those employed, 82% work in Colorado, and 78% work in a field related to their major.
 - 71% overall feel their major prepared them to be successful in their work.
- Average starting salaries vary by major and sector.
 - The average starting salary is \$39,104 (median = \$38,000).
 - Graduates employed in fields related to their major report higher salaries (\$40,048) than those who are employed outside their field of study (\$34,083).
 - Graduates employed in private-not-for-profit organizations report the highest average salary (\$41,804), while those employed by state governments report the lowest average salary (\$36,419).
- 22% of graduates are enrolled in a graduate program within six months of graduation, with 18% enrolled full-time.
 - The majority of those in graduate school are pursuing master's degrees (87%), with 7% in doctoral programs.
 - 89% feel their program prepared them to be successful in graduate school.

Data Sources

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Promising Practices

This is an overview of six promising practices that instructors can use in their classrooms to support student success. These include taking attendance, early low-stakes assessment, low-cost/no-cost textbook options, increased availability for student meetings, UNC progress reports, and student reporting.

This toolkit is not intended to be a checklist of things that teachers must do in their classroom but implementing one or more of these strategies into your classroom practice can help students be successful.

Taking Attendance

Attendance is not about teacher control but about student success! Research indicates that students who attend class regularly are more successful (Crede, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010; Schimming, n.d.; Sleigh & Ritzer, n.d.). Class attendance is a better predictor of grades than any other academic performance predictor, including ACT/SAT scores, study habits, and high school GPA (Crede et al.). The act of taking attendance indicates to students that you care about them being in the room and that attendance is important to you. The experience of being called by name as a participant at the start of a group-learning experience increases each students' personal investment in the class process. Many students at UNC express a real value of our small-classroom atmosphere relative to other universities. Being able to call your students by name certainly increases this feeling.

Tracking attendance gets results!

Faculty in UNC's Criminology & Criminal Justice program began tracking attendance and contacting students who missed two classes. CCJ faculty found that this attendance initiative revealed improved retention rates in CRJ 110 and implemented the initiative as department-wide practice. This practice has resulted in a 4-year increase in retention of new transfer students (+23%), new first year students (+12), and an overall retention rate of +7%.

How do I talk about attendance?

It's important that students know why you take attendance, so consider discussing the research about attendance and success with your students on the first day of class. It's important for students to know that attendance is more about their success than your control and that you take attendance because you care about them.

What do I do if students don't attend class?

If a student misses two classes in a row, or is consistently missing classes, email the student in a non-threatening way. For example:

I have noticed that you missed the last two classes and just wanted to check in with you. If you need any kind of help, please get in touch! Coming to class is really important, and we miss you.

What are some teaching strategies that promote better attendance?

It is also important to make class worth attending! Consider enhancing your class with activities that engage students and assist them in learning something in a way that can't be done by reading or getting notes from a friend. See Barkley (2010) and Barkley, Major, & Cross (2014) in the resources section.

What do we know about the evidence supporting an attendance policy?

While faculty can track attendance without making attendance mandatory, mandatory attendance policies can also be helpful for students. When attendance is required (i.e., attendance is graded and contributes to overall semester points) there is an additional boost. In other words, taking attendance is clearly positive for students. Taking attendance and including it as a graded event is even better. Attendance for a grade can be done positively instead of punitively – instead of taking away points for missing class students earn points for attending. This puts them in complete control of that portion of their grade.

How do I take attendance in an online course?

Canvas' Attendance tool, *Roll Call*, gives instructors the ability to take attendance in a Canvas course shell. During a pandemic, the tool can be useful for contact tracing and reporting, if necessary. The tool includes a drag and drop seating chart that works with your roster and the ability to run attendance reports.

Important things to know about using Roll Call:

- If the tool does not appear in your course menu, you have to activate it in course settings on the navigation tab.
- *Roll Call* works by generating an assignment, and as soon as you take attendance, the assignment appears on your assignments page and in your grade book. By default, the assignment is worth 100 points.
- You can make changes to any part of the assignment except the assignment title. If you change the title, the tool will not work.
- The easiest way to use the tool for grading is to put the assignment into a weighted group equal to the percentage of the grade you assign to attendance. If you do this, the point value will not matter. Note that if you do this, all assignments will be weighted and so you will have to group all of your assignments and assign the desired weights. If you use weighted groups, you can also give the tool a 0% weight so that you can use the tool without assigning a grade.
- The attendance assignment awards full credit by default, and credit is deducted based on overall attendance. For example, if a student is present on day 1 and absent on day 2, the student's attendance score is 100% after day 1 and 50% after day 2. If the student is present for the next 2 days, the overall score is 75%.
- While you can change the seating chart every day, it is designed to work best if students remain in the same seat for the entire term.

More information can be found on the [official Canvas guide to Roll Call](#), which includes information on how the tool works in Canvas, how to create a seating chart, and how to run attendance reports.

Implementing Early Low-Stakes Assessment

Incorporating early, low-stakes assessment in the first three weeks of the semester can help you gauge student progress early. These assessments also encourage attendance and help with content retention. Low-stakes assessment lowers student stress because they can build confidence in their learning in a low-risk environment. Finally, low-stakes assessment can help teachers recognize student misconceptions and knowledge gaps quickly and early. These assessments can also be used as a way to track attendance in face-to-face and online courses.

Low-Stakes Assessment Ideas

This is not an exhaustive list, but here are some examples of easy, early low-stakes assessment techniques. There is also information for using these in online courses. For more ideas see Angelo & Cross (1993), Barkley (2010), Barkley, Major, & Cross (2014) and McCartin & Dineen (2018).

- This is What I Know
 - Randomly call on students at the beginning of class and ask them to tell you one thing they already understand about the content before you jump into lecturing. You can do this in a Zoom chat and ask different students to post in the chat during each session. You can also have students submit this to a discussion forum or a quick Canvas quiz.

- Stump the Expert
 - As students enter the class, require them to turn in a 3x5 card with their name and a question on it. Randomly pull from the questions, ask where the student is seated so you can talk directly to them and answer questions for the first few minutes of class. At the end of class, pull a few more questions to answer and wrap up by asking if there's a question that remains unanswered. You can ask students to do this on a [Padlet](#) or course whiteboard to avoid exchanging paper or for an online course. Student can also submit these through a Canvas discussion forum or quiz.

- Graphic Organizer
 - During the last 5 minutes of class, give students a list of the main concepts discussed during the session and ask them to draw a picture connecting the concepts to one another with a sentence explaining why they are connecting them.

- Smaller Chunks
 - Create small quizzes for a larger unit and have students take them every few days.

- Explain It to a Second Grader
 - Ask students to explain a complex concept using simple language that is easy enough for a second grader to understand. Have them make an analogy to help clarify the subject.

- Buddy Quizzes/Group Assessment
 - Have students take a quiz independently, then take 10 minutes to meet with a small group to discuss the answers.

Providing Low-Cost/No-Cost Textbook Options

A 2014 study on student perceptions of textbooks costs found that students don't buy textbooks because they are too expensive, they took fewer courses because of high costs of books, and that they would do better in classes with a free book because there is no stress about being unable to afford the book and having access to the course content (Senack, 2014). Some suggestions for lowering this cost for students include:

- Put a print copy of the textbook on print reserve in the library.
- Put the first few chapters you assign on e-reserve in the library in case students cannot buy the book before classes due to financial aid issues.

- Fill out [this form](#) to put something on reserve.
- Consider books with no codes since students can't sell these back.
- Consider using a combination of e-books, e-book chapters, and journal articles available in the library rather than a set textbook. Students have free access to all library materials.

Being Available

Be available to students in a variety of ways so that students can communicate with you in a way they feel comfortable. This is especially important during the pandemic as the number of online courses has increased and students may not be able to meet with you in person.

Office Hours

Have office hours and discuss with students what these are. Consider calling office hours something more recognizable, such as Chat Time or Open Lab. Office hours are not familiar to many first-year students. Students may have class during office hours and perhaps addressing alternatives would be helpful. Virtual office hours can be held through Zoom or Microsoft Teams; you can use the same session link and keep it posted in a Canvas announcement all semester.

Online Discussion Forums

Set up an open discussion board in Canvas where students can post questions anonymously about course concepts and assignments. This is a low-risk way for students to indicate a question.

Completing UNC Progress Reports

UNC uses a mid-term progress report to identify students who may be struggling in their classes in order to direct them to advisors and faculty who can give them timely help and direction. Around the 5th week of classes, the AVP for Student Academic Success will send a Request for Feedback on select students who are participating in specialized academic programming or identified as someone of concern in their academic program.

Instructors are sent an email with a hyperlink to a page that allows them to indicate which of the students included in the request may be having difficulty and to specify the reason for that difficulty (e.g. excessive absences). Once the report is submitted, the information will be shared with the student by the student's advisor/academic coach, with the intent of addressing any issues before they become too serious. Feedback to the student may include utilizing your office hours to discuss questions they have or to gain a better understanding of the ways they could be more successful. These progress reports are helpful for providing early intervention to students who need support and you are encouraged to complete progress reports when asked.

Working with Student Outreach & Support (SOS)

Student Outreach and Support (SOS) helps students navigate difficult situations, such as food and housing insecurity, mental health concerns, personal or family crisis, and illnesses or injuries that may limit their ability to be successful. To connect a student to SOS, you can email sos@unco.edu, call 970-351-2796, or submit a Student of Concern report at <https://www.unco.edu/dean-of-students/share-concern.aspx>

Resources

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