

# The Impact of Counseling on Student Retention and Academic Performance

A White Paper

## ■ INTRODUCTION

For two- and four-year colleges, student retention rates and academic performance offer unique insight into the nature of students' college experiences. Nearly one student out of every four at four-year universities withdraw, while that number increases to approximately one out of two for those students at two-year universities. Critically, withdrawals negatively impact budgets, enrollment stability, administrative planning, as well as public opinion.

Fortunately, comprehensive research studies indicate that counseling services improve the student experience at college, especially in three critical areas:

### **Benefits of Counseling:**

1. Enhanced mental health and well-being
2. Increased likelihood of graduation
3. Improved academic performance

## ■ TWO STUDIES

The results of two studies, described below, demonstrate that students who attend counseling sessions experienced higher retention rates as well as sustained or improved academic performance than students who had not utilized counseling services.

One study, conducted at Southern Illinois University, found that students who received thirteen or more counseling sessions were 36% more likely to graduate than students who wanted, but did not receive counseling. Even for students who accessed counseling for between one and seven sessions, the impact was appreciable, with a 19% higher likelihood of graduation than students who wanted, but did not receive, counseling. Included below is a graph of the findings.

In a second study, conducted at Western State University, nearly 50% of student participants said their personal problems caused them to consider withdrawing from the university. Additionally, 70% of students who utilized the counseling center reported that “personal problems” affected their academic performance.

Attesting to the benefits of robust counseling services:

- 61% of students said that counseling had helped them maintain or improve their academics; and
- 44% reported that counseling had helped them decide to remain enrolled

Counseling services, therefore, offer a unique venue for university administrations to improve student health, retention and performance; especially those administrations guided by proven public health approaches.

## ■ ABOUT KOGNITO

Kognito Interactive, developers of web-based, interactive training simulations and learning games, has recently developed At-Risk, a gatekeeper training program for university faculty. At-Risk uses Kognito’s Human Interaction Simulation Platform™, which is based on social cognition research. Using the platform, At-Risk allows users to immerse themselves in a risk-free conversation experience, where they can practice how to effectively identify, approach and refer students in mental distress. Here, users can experiment with different tactics and approaches and experience their consequences. As a result, they become more confident, motivated, and capable to manage similar conversations in real-life. At-Risk for University Faculty was released in 2009, and has been added to the SPRC/AFSP Best Practices Registry. It is currently being used by over 50 institutions. You can view a demo of At-Risk at [www.kognito.com/atrisk](http://www.kognito.com/atrisk).