

# The Design of Retention/Persistence Initiatives Based on the Rhythm of the Student Year from a First Year Mature Student's Perspective

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# Lewin's Change Model



# Astin's Theory of Involvement

For learning to occur students must feel connected and engaged with their environment or campus



# Schlossberg's Transition Theory

How  
Transition  
Affects  
Individuals

## Schlossberg Transition Model

The Four S's

- Situation
- Self
- Support
- Strategies



# Tinto's Retention Theory

Generally speaking students who experience difficulty adjusting to their new environment, who feel isolated will have difficulty engaging and absorbing new information



# Who Are Mature Years Students?

Those who have no third level experience or may not have completed secondary school

Those who have some association with third level

Those who come into UCD on secondary school results

Those who have degrees but are studying to a second undergraduate degree

# Overview MY Students UCD/Ireland

	Dr. Bairbre Fleming 2013 UCD Survey	MSI all Ireland 2103 Survey
	438 /926 mature students surveyed responded	Approximately 2,000 respondents
Gender	58% F 42%M	55% F /45% M
Mean age	36.4	46.5
Median age	32	34/35
Parents did not complete 3 <sup>rd</sup> level	80%	80%
Married or w/partner	40%	36%
Child Dependents	37%	43%
Adult Dependent		45%
Receiving state financial assistance	50%	60%
Out of education more than 3 years		59%
No participation in post-secondary education before entering HE	32%	27%
Finances difficult or precarious		60% -66%



# Overview MY Students UCD/Ireland

**Early to mid-Thirties**

First in family to attend

Low Income

Dependents children or adults

Many single so no support at home



# Rhythm of Student Year from a First Year Mature Student's Perspective

Mid-July MYs Students accept their offer to University

# Rhythm of Student Year from a First Year Mature Student's Perspective

Leap of faith validated

Excited and anxious

Uncertainty

Wondering what is next

Lewin's Model begins to kick in

# First Intervention

Entering  
Mature  
Students  
Need to  
Feel Connected

Email immediately &  
welcome entering mature  
students

Let them know we are very  
glad they accepted the offer

Invite them to  
pre-registration  
academic supports

Invite them to a  
pre-orientation  
Orientation

# MY Student Response

Sign up for Pre-registration programmes  
(Writing workshop-Mathematics workshops  
Mature students orientation)

&

Ring and email right away to get questions  
answered immediately and find solutions for  
difficulties such as childcare, work, finance,  
parking and registration.

# MY Student Response

The students response displays the beginnings of Engagement and thus the beginning of the Change to the desired new state (that of being a university student)

(Astin, Scholssberg Tinto)

# Our Second Intervention

Basic information and advice through phone, email and in person to remain calm

Clear up small or basic queries

Long -finger queries that can be addressed in a larger group

Part of the integration and embracing of students and ensuring they don't feel isolated or ignored

# Mature Student Response

Mature Students sign up for pre-registration programmes

Come in to campus to look around

# Our Third Intervention - 2-3 weeks before term begins

Pre-registration programmes begin

Students meet other mature students and begin the process of acculturation to being a student

We meet all those who have signed up for the pre-registration programmes

Have lots of one-to-one advice sessions

Meet all those who attend the pre-orientation orientation and get them ready for Orientation Week.



# Third Intervention

These transition activities are very important in the mature student transition to university

Take away the mystery

Do away with isolation

Provide Engagement with the campus community

Provide Engagement with other students

Breaking of old life and creation of new reality

# Our 4<sup>th</sup> Intervention - Orientation Week

A Few Hundred Entering  
Mature Years Students

v. 4,000 Entering 18  
Year Old First Years

# Our 4<sup>th</sup> Intervention

Not Much of an  
Intervention

We have to let go of  
the hands

- President's Welcome
- Registration
- Student Card
- IT induction
- Campus Tours
- Library Tour
- INFORMATION OVERLOAD

# Peer Mentors

Peer Mentor: UCD has a great Peer Mentor programme running in each School.

Often the Peer Mentor is going to be a 19 or 20 year old and the other students in the peer group will be 19 or 20 year olds.

It can be a bit uncomfortable all around. Makes one doubt the decision of entering in the first place.

# Peer Mentoring

As with Orientation - at this point I have to have almost no intervention as the entering Mature Years student must navigate this themselves and come to terms with the stark reality of close quarters with the younger cohort

This is true whether the mature years student is 23 or 43 and it is often the older mature student who handles this situation better

# Lectures Commence

## New Skill Sets Needed

### Academic Environment

Lecture Halls

Seminar

Modules

Credit

Taking Notes

Endnote

Plagiarism

Learning How to Learn

### New Communication Environment

University email

Blackboard

Digital communication

Peer Mentor Meeting

# Week 1: From a Home Perspective for Mature Students

All home work still needs doing as before

Childcare

Parent care

Work

Dishes, laundry

Transportation schedule

New schedule needed

Managing expectations for those around you -  
children, partners, mates

# Intervention 5

Emails from me regarding my own one-to-one service and other supports

Advice to not get overwhelmed

Walk around campus to let mature students see me



# Week- 2

Everyone Overwhelmed

Too much information

Too much to get used to

Too much confusion adjusting to academic life

# Intervention 6

- Week 2 is what is known as Freshers' Week and so I implore mature students to join clubs and societies.
- Get Involved. Engage with the campus and the new life as a student.
- Test the waters as it were. Jump right in.
- It's a bit strange in a way as we are asking students to forget about the academic side (after 2 weeks) and look for the other parts of university life but see Scholssberg, Tinto, Astin etc The importance of engagement and the transition

# Where engagement theory slips

Many mature students can not partake of these other parts of university as they have other commitments i.e family or work and so when modules/classes are over they have to leave the campus, pick children up, make food, go to work etc.

Many mature students are trying to fit a degree into their routine or more accurately squeeze a degree into their lives.

# Rhythm of Student Year from a First Year Mature Student's Perspective

## Week 3 & 4

### Disillusionment

Academic confusion as the workload seems too much.

Disbelief that they can attain what is needed academically as assessments are looming.

# Intervention 7

## Engagement

In collaboration with the Mature Student Society a lunch or some get-together so mature students can mix and feel involved and do something other than go to class. This first event of the Society is always very well attended

And as Schlossberg points out mature students are strategising how to cope with their new situation one of which might be withdrawing

# Week 5

## PANIC!

first assessments  
due in a week

what am I doing? I  
knew I was a fraud

I have nothing to  
benchmark against

I am going to be  
judged on my ability  
or inability



## CONFUSION

So busy academically all home life is in a shambles

Children upset that you are not around

Partners upset that you are not around

Work upset that you are not around

Haven't yet worked out a rhythm for study and writing



# Week 5

One Thing Works

Laundry, dishes,  
hoovering, dusting all  
done in order to avoid  
assessments.

Chocolate all eaten!



# Intervention 8

Mass email:

Target feelings of isolation (Tinto) and I will add in one of Chickering/Reisser's (1993) 7 Vectors - that of Developing Competence

Let student know that I know what they are thinking and feeling

Ask students to try to be calm and to please come in and talk

Remind students that they have faced adversity before many times and come out of it

# Intervention 9

## Week 7

Email student to congratulate them on reaching this milestone and remind them that they are halfway through

For many students week six/seven is the lightbulb moment when it all begins to make sense

# Week 9

Exam timetable published

Realisation that more work has to be handed up

Panic

Academic crisis

# Intervention 10

Point to exam workshops, past exam papers, speaking to lecturers and tutors

Remind students of upcoming mid-year break

Reinforce students' own competence, knowledge

Let mature students know that no matter what the outcome they should come and see me after results come out as all academic situations are salvageable

# Week 12

For those who have made it this far

They have adjusted, integrated, Re-Frozen in to the new dynamic

Still some doubts of course until after exam results: what happens if I fail etc. but head down and study

# Exams

Very little student contact for me as students finish exams and disappear until the new year

# After Exams

Once exams are finished students return to their former life and crash



# Rhythm of student year from a first year mature student's perspective

## Week 17

- College re-opens
- Staff back to work
- Registration reopens, some students may change Semester 2 modules
- New Years Resolutions



# PUZZLE

*Jack is looking at Sinead, but Sinead is looking at Saoirse. Jack is married, but Saoirse is not. Is a married person looking at an unmarried person?*

A: Yes

B: No

C: Cannot be determined



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# Mature Students: Retention Begins Before Entry

To find out if these interventions have any statistical impact on persistence/retention and where such interventions fall down please come to the **Parallel Session 6 @ 4:15**

## **Mature Students: Retention Begins Before Entry**

My colleague Thomond Coogan and I will present some findings on persistence/retention for mature students in UCD