

GUIDE TO DEVELOPING RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS AND SCHOOLS



Clark Atlanta University
Division of Academic Affairs
2005



In academic year 2003-04 Clark Atlanta University (CAU) identified as one of its major institutional concerns the enhancement and expansion of existing efforts to address the retention and ultimate graduation of students. The first initiative undertaken was the development of a more detailed and comprehensive plan for retaining students. This plan served three primary purposes. First, it articulated the institutional vision for successful retention of our students. Second, it defined the goals, objectives and expected outcomes by which this could be accomplished. And third, it established a common framework for both the existing programmatic retention initiatives available at the university and those which might be developed in the future. ***A Retention Plan for Students at Clark Atlanta University*** was adopted in the Spring of 2004. This plan included the following Vision Statement:

By fostering a supportive and nurturing environment that emphasizes best practices in teaching effectiveness, student support and the use of educational resources, Clark Atlanta University strives to increase student achievement, leading to higher levels of retention and graduation. Emphasis is placed on developing students with higher levels of critical thinking skills and life skills that are important for academic and professional success.

Concurrent with the adoption and dissemination of the retention plan and as a part of the university's ongoing institutional effectiveness process, a revised strategic plan was developed charting the vision and priorities for the university over the next five years. This plan, ***A Foundations for Institutional Prominence and Distinctiveness: A Strategic Agenda for Clark Atlanta University, 2005-2010,*** was presented in October 2004. The plan rests on five focus areas, each of which sets forth a strategic initiative by which the plan's goals and objectives will be accomplished.

Focus Area # 3 in this plan is Student Recruitment and Retention. This strategic initiative is intended to establish a stable enrollment base at the university. The goal of which is to increase enrollment through successful recruitment and retention of a diverse population of students who demonstrate academic achievement or the potential to succeed in CAU's academic programs. Among the key indicators used to determine the accomplishment of the goal of this initiative by 2010 will be 1) an increase in the retention rate of first-year undergraduate students to 84% and 2) an increase in the five-year graduation rate to 40%. Central to the accomplishment of the retention goals and objectives contained in these plans is a major shift in the current

paradigm by which we have viewed the locus of responsibility for retention at CAU. No longer can we assume that the responsibility for improving student retention is, or should be, assigned the total responsibility of one individual or unit. The scope and breadth of a successful student retention program covers every facet of institutional operation. It is, therefore, the responsibility of everyone at the university. Academic schools, departments and their faculties are especially well suited to play a critical role in efforts to improve student retention and graduation rates. Until now, CAU has never facilitated this involvement by requesting the development and implementation of specific measurable actions by academic units which are directed towards accomplishing this goal.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to provide schools and departments with instructions for developing a set of *action-oriented* retention strategies which will be implemented immediately in support of efforts to improve the retention and graduation of students. These actions should be developed in keeping with the goals, objectives and expected outcomes of the above-noted plans. The overarching intent of this initiative is the focus on actions which promote student engagement with members of the CAU faculty for the purpose of facilitating academic success.

III. Scope of Activities

The scope of specific activities appropriate for this initiative, as reflected in the previously referenced retention and strategic plans, is wide ranging. However, in order to provide some continuity among action strategies developed by academic units and to allow for the ongoing assessment and evaluation of the overall impact of these, three specific areas of focus are to be addressed, namely, **1) Academic Advisement, 2) Mentoring; and 3) Academic Support Services.** It is expected that these action strategies emanate from the department or program level and can realistically be accomplished within the current academic year. Every effort should be made to utilize and connect these strategies to existing policies and programs at the university. An implementation time line and a process for measuring the success of these action strategies should be an integral part of what is proposed. School Deans will be responsible for reviewing, approving and monitoring the development and implementation of these retention strategies in collaboration with the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. An annual accomplishment report will be provided by the Division of Academic Affairs to the President no later than April 30, 2006.

IV. Understanding Retention, Persistence, and Graduation

Clark Atlanta University is a comprehensive university, offering degrees at the bachelor's, master's, specialist and doctoral levels. As such, the Retention Plan developed was designed to reflect the broad scope of students matriculating at the university and to recognize the range of issues that impact their academic performance and success. While the rationale for choosing this approach was formulated to reflect the diversity of our student population, it is important to understand the distinctive terminology used in higher education to address the problems associated with student academic progress and completion rates.

Key Terms:

- # Retention
- # Persistence
- # Graduation

Definitions for these and other key terms have been provided by the Office of Planning Assessment and Research (OPAR). These definitions along with select demographic student data are contained on the following pages. Schools and departments should also use previous data on their students provided by OPAR in designing their action strategies.

Definitions Used to Support the Measurement of Retention, Persistence and Graduation Rates

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August 31, 2005

The basic definition is that the foundational element for establishing the measurement of retention rates, persistence rates, and graduation rates is the cohort.

A **Cohort** is a specific group of students with similar characteristics established for tracking purposes. For the Graduation Rate Survey, the initial cohort is defined as all students who enter an institution as Full-time, First-time degree-seeking students either (1) the fall term of a given year, or (2) between September 1 and August 31 of the same academic year (IPEDS).

Freshman Retention Rate indicates the average proportion of a specific cohort (by date) who enrolled as a First-time, First-year student during a fall term and returned the following fall (*U.S. News and World Report*).

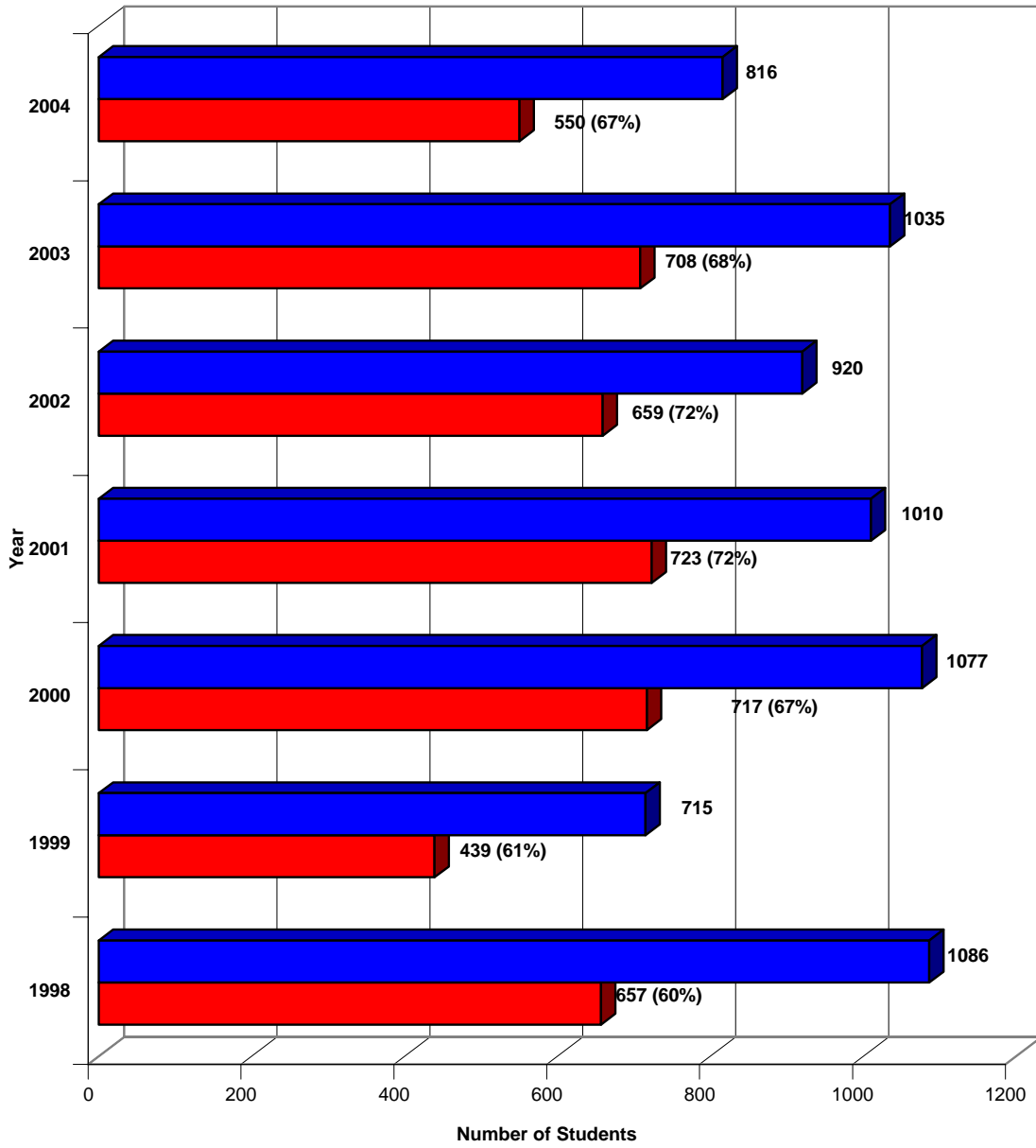
First-Time, First-Year Student – A student attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term. Also includes students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school) (IPEDS).

Persistence (Progression) Rate indicates the number or percentage of students of a specific cohort that earns a specific number of credit hours in an academic year that will classify them as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors within a specific time frame not to exceed six years (Office of Planning, Assessment and Research and Undergraduate Catalog, 2004-2006, p. 74).

Credit Hour is a unit of measure representing an hour (50 minutes) of instruction over a fifteen (15) – week period in a semester or trimester system or a ten (10) – week period in a quarter system. It is applied toward the total number of hours needed for completing the requirements of a degree, diploma, certificate or other formal award (IPEDS).

Graduation Rate – Rate required for disclosure and/or reporting purposes under Student Right-to-Know. Calculated as the total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the revised cohort minus any allowable exclusions (IPEDS).

Freshman Retention Rate
Clark Atlanta University
1998-2004



■ Number Returned Next Fall Semester ■ Number Enrolled

**Freshmen Retention Rate
Clark Atlanta University
1998-2004**

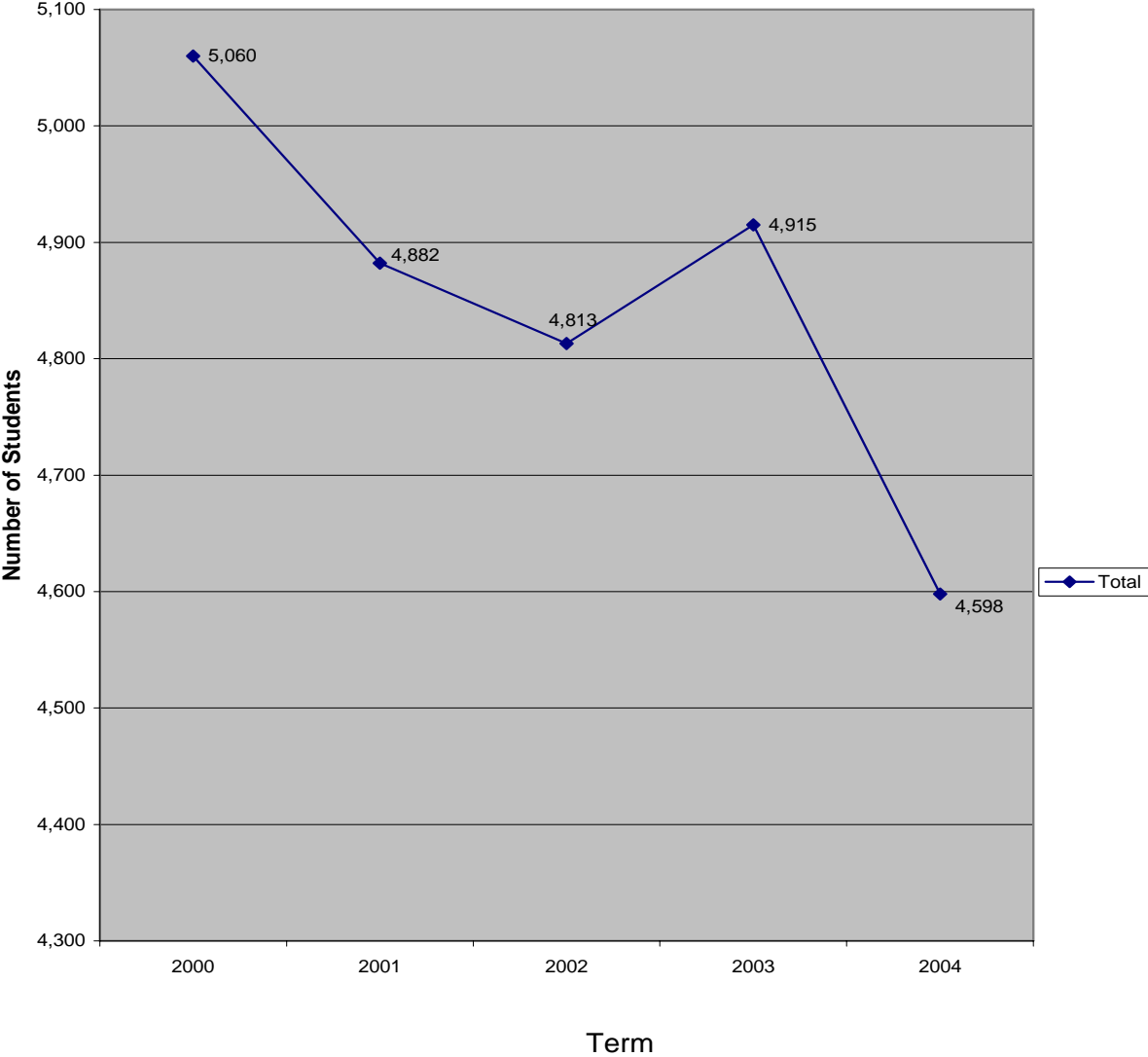
Year	Returned	Enrolled	Retention %
1998	657	1086	60%
1999	439	715	61%
2000	717	1077	67%
2001	723	1010	72%
2002	659	920	72%
2003	708	1035	68%
2004	550	816	67%

Source: Office of Planning, Assessment, Research, Clark Atlanta University, 1998-2004

Note: During the period 1998-2002, the **average freshman retention rate** was sixty-six percent (66%).

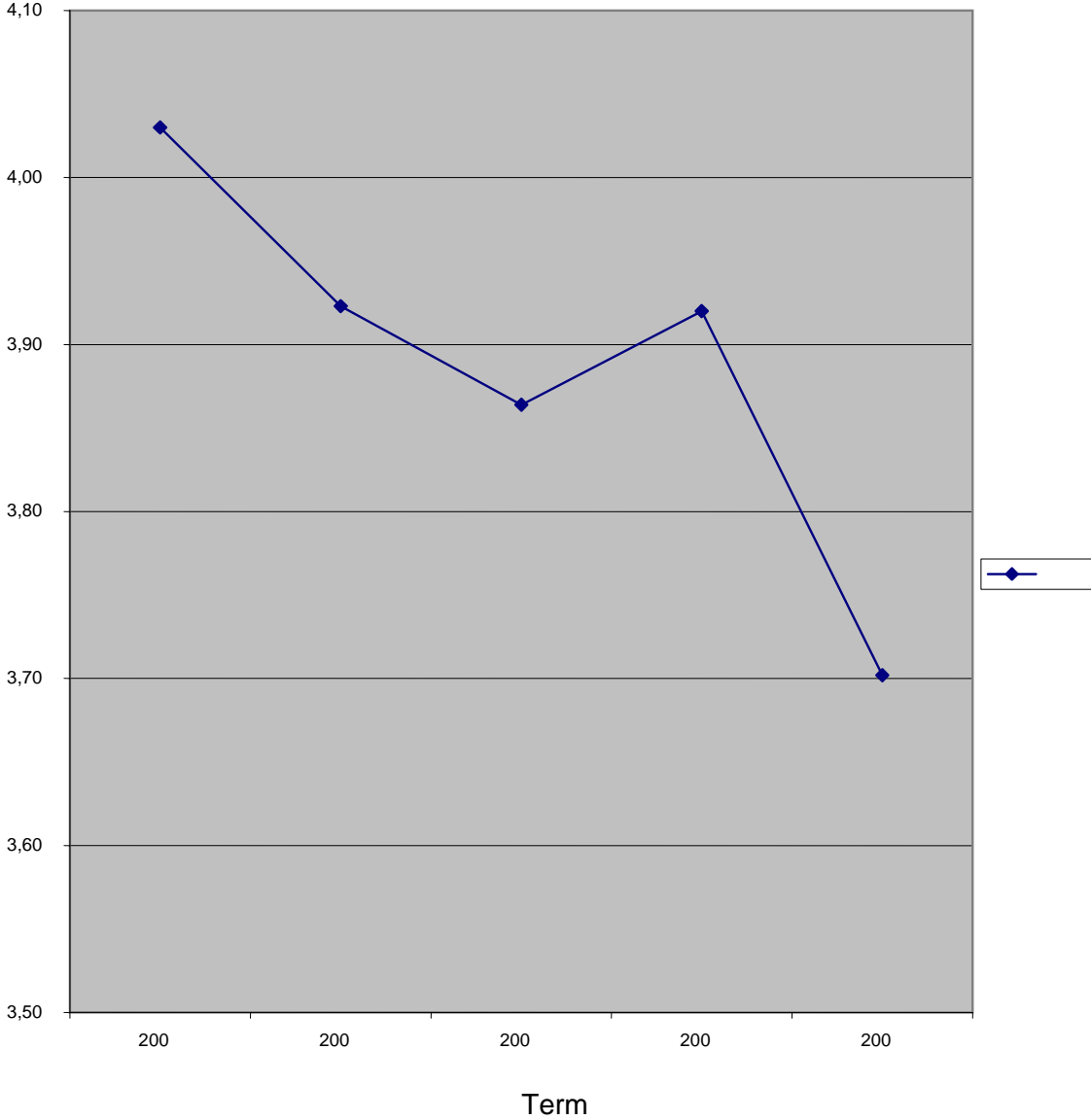
Note: During the period 2000-2004, the **average freshman retention rate** was sixty-nine percent (69%).

**Figure 1: Student (Undergraduate and Graduate) Enrollment
Clark Atlanta University: Fall. 2000-2004**



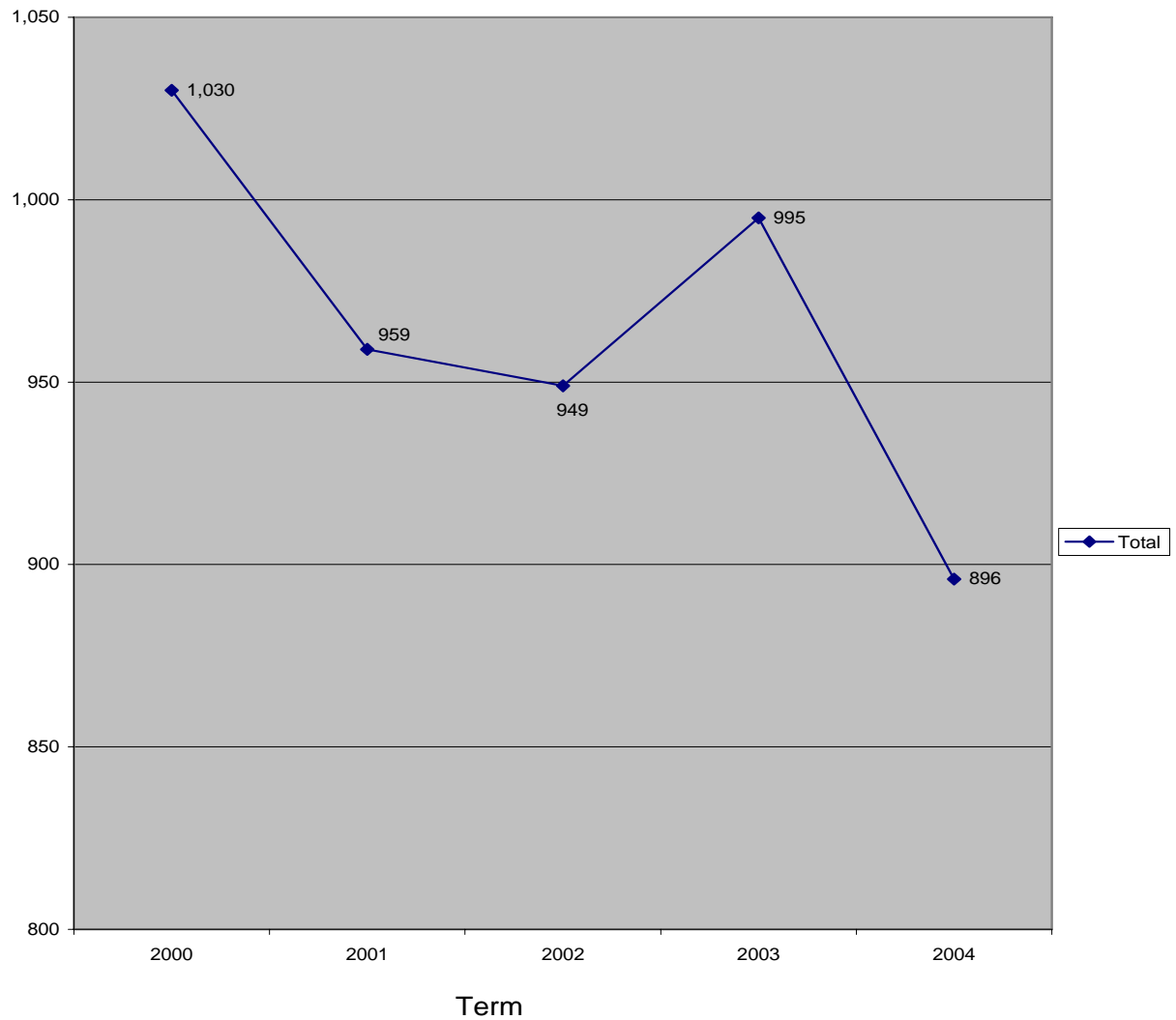
Baseline Analysis: The average headcount during the 2000-2004 period was 4,854.

**Figure 2: Undergraduate Student
Clark Atlanta University: Fall, 2000-**



Baseline: The average headcount undergraduate enrollment during the 2000-2004 period was

**Figure 3: Graduate Student Enrollment
Clark Atlanta University: Fall, 2000-2004**



Baseline Analysis: The average headcount graduate enrollment during the 2000-2004 period was 966.

V. Required Components

For each of the three areas of action strategies to be included, **Academic Advisement, Mentoring, and Academic Support Services**, the following five components are to be included. These are:

1. the targeted group for which the strategy is intended (i.e., student major, classification, etc.);
2. identified goals and objectives;
3. expected outcomes;
4. detailed actions to be taken;
5. process for measuring or evaluating results

A minimum of **one (1)** action strategy should be developed for each of the three areas. The following format should be used to document the planned action strategies developed. This form should be submitted to the Dean and used to track and guide implementation of the identified strategies.

Academic Department/School Retention Strategies

School _____

Semester/Year _____

Department _____

Responsible Official _____

Instructions: For each of the three retention areas shown below, complete items 1-5. Submit the completed form to the office of your School Dean. Retain a copy of this form for your files.

Academic Advisement:

1. Describe targeted group for which action strategy is intended:
2. Identify the goal(s) and objective(s):

 Goal:

 Objective:

 Goal:

 Objective:
3. Expected outcome(s):
4. Briefly list the specific action to be taken:
5. Describe how the action strategy will be evaluated.

VI. Steps for Developing Department/School Action/Strategies

- Step 1: Review the existing goals, objectives and expected outcomes identified in the Retention and Strategic Plans.
- Step 2: Determine the departmental or school cohort to which your targeted action strategies will be directed (i.e., freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate students, students at risk, specific courses, etc.).
- Step 3: Determine the action strategy to be implemented.
- Step 4: Develop the goals, objectives, and expected outcomes for which the action strategy is intended to accomplish.
- Step 5: Develop a time line and the related actions to be taken to implement the strategy.
- Step 6: Establish an evaluation process by which the success of the strategy can be measured.
- Step 7: Complete and submit required form to the Office of the Dean*.

*** School plans are to be submitted to the Office of the Provost on September 30, 2005. Deans should establish internal time lines within their respective schools to ensure the ability to meet this deadline.**

VII. University Resources

1. Academic Instructional Technology Center
3rd Floor McPheeters-Dennis Hall
404-880-6194
2. Career Planning and Placement Center
Modular 13 – President’s Parking Lot
404-880-6791
3. Center for Academic Achievement
Lower Level – Kresge Hall
404-880-8330
4. Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
1125 Fountain Drive, S.W.
404-880-8014
5. Leadership and Professional Development Program
99 Wright Hall
404-880-6362
6. Living Learning Experience
Center for Academic Achievement
Lower Level – Kresge Hall
404-880-8227
7. Office of Enrollment Services and Student Retention
214 Haven-Warren Hall
404-880-8506
8. Office of Graduate Studies/Research and Sponsored Programs
102 Kresge Hall
404-880-8736
9. Office of Planning Assessment and Research
301 Kresge Hall
404-880-8062
9. Office of Undergraduate Studies
211 Harkness Hall
404-880-8767