

## Optimizing Student Success: Increasing Retention and Graduates Ready for the Demands of the Twenty-First Century Global Marketplace

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### Abstract

*This article reviews the various methods, programs and pedagogy currently used to enhance the experiences of college students, specifically the first year experiences aimed at reducing attrition. Attrition rates remain high with statistics ranging from one-third to one-half of students entering Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) dropping out within or just after the first year. With increasing numbers of adults entering colleges for the first or second time, colleges face issues of diverse student population therefore a great array of student needs. In addition to meeting student needs, colleges must meet the demands of the socio-political and economic situations of the twenty firstcentury or risk losing the confidence of, or support from, local to national levels. More and more educators agree that a shift must take place in higher education from the traditional methods of teaching and learning to transformative ones. Unfortunately most HEI's remain unresponsive. Based on the argument, supported by several progressive scholars, that adult learners must learn in a transformational manner to adequately navigate the 21<sup>st</sup> century terrain of life,I propose that by employing an integrally informed first-year program aimed at increasing student success/transformation using the AQAL model developed by Ken Wilber as its map, colleges can increase student retention and produce graduates more capable of navigating the diverse and complex 21<sup>st</sup> century global marketplace.*

Optimizing Student Success: Increasing retention and graduates ready for the demands of the twenty-first century global marketplace

Having been a full-time educator at an HEI for the past 10 years, I have seen the strain attrition causes on the various levels of the institution. Despite programs that have been employed before and during my employment to address attrition, the problem remains (independently of financial prosperity or decline). My institution, unfortunately, is not an exception; retention has been a problem for higher education and a main focus of study for decades. In fact, an entire journal is dedicated to it<sup>i</sup>. Most studies on retention agree with Tinto's<sup>ii</sup> assessment that both social and academic integration are crucial for student retention. Progressive education theorists suggest that the programs and pedagogy that HEI's are employing to increase retention are destined to fall short or even fail if we cannot loosen them from the mold of modernity in which they were cast (Allesio,1996; Coaldrake& Stedman, 1999; Edwards, 2011; Kunstler, 2006; Lin & Luk, 2002; Kegan, 1994; Weld & Trainer, 2007). They are limited in their breadth and depth and therefore only produce minimal success within a post-modern world.

The adult student today must cope with and manage much more than in past centuries (Adams, 2010; Kegan, 1994; Edwards, 2011; Dines & Bailor, 2012; Sandlin, Wright, & Clarke, 2013; Holley, 2009). So, the problem of retention in part coincides with the demand for a different learner/citizen. Gone are the days of almost exclusively honoring and utilizing transmission based pedagogy, the scientific method of inquiry, learning in situations founded and grounded in seventeenth century ideals (Kunstler, 2006; Esbjorn-Hargens, 2010; Allesio, 1996). Today's higher education (HE) student not only needs the skills necessary to master the job or career for which he is studying (traditional academic work), but must be able to navigate contemporary life which is fast paced, in constant flux, technologically dependent, pluralistic and global (extremely diverse). This requires transformative learning. I agree with Kunstler who states, "The university system finds its own ancient foundations eroding in the face of social transformation of a scale equal to that from which it rose. No safe path beckons universities through the *selvaoscura* of declining relevance and the "casual arrogance of misplaced certainty and naïve absence of imagination" that David Pearce Snyder describes as defining higher education's response to a rapidly shifting learning environment" (p. 63). This learning environment mirrors the global environment in which graduates will be asked to effectively live and work.

Another area where many HEI's seem to fall short is in addressing, including, and preparing students for the diversity of not only the HEI's population but of humankind in the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketplace (Spellman, 2007; Allesio, 1996). Allesio suggests that,

Rather than finding new and improved ways of forcing people from non-traditional backgrounds to think the way people from the mainstream scientists think, it would be more constructive to find ways to better understand and appreciate how people from excluded groups think and the possible benefits of their perspectives and information (p. 84).

The feeling of rejection, not fitting in, or having little value is a major cause of attrition not to mention a major drawback for success in the workplace.

I will first look at the causes of attrition (lack of academic and social integration excellence) and the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century global market and show that HEI's need a more progressive plan to increase student success and satisfaction. This paper examines some retention strategies focusing primarily on those that utilize a first-year program, as those strategies have proven to be more effective than ones just implementing one strategy such as improving the student services department (Ahuna, Tinnesz, and VanZile-Tamsen, 2010; Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Nelson, Quinn, Marrington & Clarke, 2012). I also hope to show that the reason why attrition remains a problem for many HEI's is because current programs lack the depth and breadth needed for them to address the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century student and adult entering this global market. Current programs, despite their attempts to bring social and academic relevance and value to the students, still fall short. Why? Commenting on their findings Yorke and Longdon (2008) summarize by saying,

There is no simple way in which the chances of non-completion can be reduced. As Harvey et al. (2006) point out, there is not a monolithic 'first-year experience' (although the monolithic shorthand has some utility) but a plurality of first-year experiences that reflect the diversity in the students' lives in the academic and extra-academic arenas. The challenge for institutions is to find ways of optimizing the chances of individual students' success (p. 52).

I agree and posit that by utilizing an Integral first-year program that can and will address 21<sup>st</sup> century needs, HEI's will have greater success retaining students and producing valuable graduates more capable of navigating this highly complex and diverse working environment that today's adults find themselves plunged into. By addressing the social and academic integration issues that plague retention, an Integral program can and will optimize "the chances of *individual* (my emphasis) students' success"

(Yorke&Longdon, 2008,p. 52). Being integral by design and implication anIntegral first-year program (IFYP) integrates the individual and collective, and the traditional past with 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive methods,in order to fully develop (and encourage transformation of)the learner both academically and socially. An IFYP can show the relevance of the students' studies and the value of the individual students' ideas thus inadvertentlyimproving the HEI's environment, success rates, and relevancy.

### **The Threefold Problem**

The problem of attrition stems from the students' perceived lack of value and or relevancy both for the individual herself as well as her area of study. Three major interrelated areas (difficult to separate) or causes of attrition are worth exploration. First, how can HEIs establish strong social bonds and trust with their students helping them form their own social support thereby increasing social integration? Second, how can HEIs prepare the student academically while showing the value of their studies, and in doing so, increase academic integration? Third, how can HEIs show the importance of the students' education whilecombining the students' needs with the needs and demands of the twenty-first century market producing for the student and HEI the much needed relevancy?

So first, what is happening to increase social connection and integration thereby increasing the students' perceived value? If the student thinks that the only reason anyone would care if they stay or leave is their tuition check then they do not feel valued. Students feel valued when they believe that others think that where they come from, what they think, and what they like to do is cool, interesting or relevant. Kantanis(2000) reports that one third of students drop out in the first year at a HEI and that "Students who do not have a positive experience in making the social transition at university face increased difficulty in negotiating their way through the challenges of the first year (Abstract)." Several researches agree that programs must be put into place to increase socialization, trust, andto improve the students' overall sense of belonging. Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld's(2005) entire study supports the proposition that in order for retention to be increased "equal emphasis needs to be placed on successful integration into the social world of the university as into the academic world" (p. 707). Wilcox et al. argue that many students have a large disconnect with their previous home life and the "home life" of the university. Often living space is shared and the necessity for compatibility is paramount. Universities could help in this process by providing plenty of social activities where new friendships and connections can be made early on in addition to matching students' compatibilities before pairing them as roommates. Also establishing and maintaining strong relationships with college staff, tutors, and other classmates is an important ingredient for retention. They found that the more encouraging the staff member or tutor was the more likely the student would stay (Wilcox, et al., 2005). Gallard, Abritton, & Morgan, (2010) would agree saying tutoring can be a very effective way to increase social connection as well as academic readiness.

Other researchers such as Ahuna et al., Nelson et al., and Pitkethly& Prosser focus on more comprehensive approaches (combining the above practices plus a first-year program including seminar and/or cohort programs) for addressing social integration issues that I will discuss later while exploring best practices both integral and not for addressing retention as it relates to social and academic value and relevance. For the most part, first-year programs put into place practices regarding social integration including orientations to campuses, introductions to staff and faculty, student or faculty tutors or mentors, student services facilities including what activities and clubs are available to join, and creating freshman seminar groups or cohorts. Students for the most part must take it on themselves to find this information and then choose if and in what to participate unless they are assigned to a freshman group or cohort.

Akin to social integration is academic integration. Many schools include remedial courses to help students whose reading, writing, speaking, and mathematic skills are not at college level yet. These courses

are a necessity for community colleges where the standards for college entrance are not as high as some universities. These courses definitely aid in college retention. Even so, there can often be a problem integrating from high school expectation and teaching styles to college expectations and teaching styles. Much of this is a shift from transmission based learning (memorizing then testing) which they learn in high school to self-directed learning (able to examine themselves, cultures, think for themselves) (Edwards, 2011). Students often find themselves unprepared to take on the rigor of college study, much of it requiring them to steer away from what they can find on Google, memorize, and regurgitate onto a paper. Many do not know how to express their own ideas because they do not know what they are. They have not been asked to formulate new possibilities, rather, to show what they have read and offer the interpretation that their teacher has been told is the correct answer (Dines & Bailer, 2012). It has been my experience that the student stares blankly at you and can't comprehend that a paper they thought they correctly cited ("the information for this paper came from [www.website.A2Z](#), and Wikipedia") has been 85% - 95% plagiarized. Independent learning is an expectation that academics have, more often than not, of first-year students but what this actually means and how students can meet this expectation is seldom made clear (Kantanis, 2000). Often students can find it difficult to function in a classroom in which "everything they have thought to be the truth is now open to interrogation" (Dines & Bailer, 2012, p.102). This is especially true of the adolescent group of college enrollees coming directly from high school but similar problems in academic readiness and integration also appear in the adult returning to school. In order to alleviate lack of academic readiness, colleges have included in their retention programs: orientations, faculty syllabi, and courses, strategies to promote and encourage self-regulated or independent learning. Some of these strategies are: implementing a critical thinking course, encouraging questioning current ideology (media) and methods, creating cross-disciplinary assignments to view a concept or problem through multiple lenses, journaling assignments, and peer tutoring to name a few.

The third area related to low retention is relevance, specifically, academic relevance as it relates to the HEI's ability to address twenty-first century issues and demands while preparing students to manage them. The largest issue at play here is the resistance or inability to change, which is often the case for HEI's (Kezar, 2005; Edwards, 2011; Weld & Trainer, 2007). Most HEI's are still discipline based (an approach HEIs have utilized since their conception) although there have been moves in recent years for schools to become more cross-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary because, "undergraduate education is increasingly recognized as a dynamic enterprise, one that should be responsive to the complex society in which students live" (Holley, 2009, p. 2). There are few HEIs that have broken completely free of the disciplinary approach, even if they boast being cross-disciplinary. They are trying to work within a system that does not support it (Weld & Trainer, 2007; Kezar, 2007; Edwards, 2011). The prevalence of the disciplinary approach keeps HEIs from being not only relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands, but prevents them from being the driving forces of social change that they are charged to be (Crittenden, 2007; Feldman, 2007; Allesio, 1996; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; Kezar, 2005; Kunstler, 2006). Another component related to relevancy is that many HEI's are resistant to honoring alternative ways of knowing and learning. Kunstler argues that HEIs are too slow to embrace "digitalized literacy" (p.64) and Sandlin, Wright and Clarke (2013) purport that the adult today learns outside the HEI in and through contemporary fragmented, digital, media saturated culture and that this is largely ignored or missing from dominant discourses on adult learning. They argue that "public pedagogy" is a huge factor in self-identity development (p. 3). Feldman (2007), commenting on her classroom experiences says, education is "delivering a message of more limited value to a world that needs much more...The information production of today's techno-economic matrix has far outpaced the educational system's ability to bring meaning to the resulting new phenomena (p. 29)." When alternative ways (other than cognitive which are highly endorsed in HEIs) of knowing are downplayed, then the ability

to effectively address and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fragmented and insufficient (Sandlin et al., 2011; Fischler, 2007; Schmidt, 2012; Feldman, 2007).

### **Current Programs**

First, I would like to discuss some retention strategies that seem to have had a positive impact on retention by increasing student socialization and academic integration. The first program I looked at by Petkethly and Prosser (2007) applied Fullan's theory of successful change processes. They also looked at Tinto's six principles which underpin successful attempts to enhance first-year experience. These principles are: (1) Students enter with or have opportunity to acquire skills needed for academic success, (2) personal contact with other students extends beyond academic life, (3) retention actions are systematic, (4) retention programs address student needs clearly, (5) Retention programs are student centered, and (6) education is the goal of retention programs (p. 187). This program included three major areas. First, university wide action focused on new students' academic and social well-being by enhancing student learning experiences. Second, ongoing routine and systematic collection of data was employed. Third, strategies were developed to address transition issues that were mainstreamed into the programs and processes. They worked off the premise that change is voluntary, the desire of the college developed incrementally, and is situated within the structures of the University. The result of the implementation of this process was a coordinated, informed, university wide response to transition issues that improved learning experiences for all first-year students. The drawbacks of this method were that it was not centrally driven or constituted and thus resulted in a slower process and could be subject to quality fluctuation (p. 196).

Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007) chose to model their student retention program after customer retention management or relationship marketing. The principles of relationship marketing are to get close to the customers or be where they are, developing trust because that is a primary factor in building loyalty, and understanding that retention is everyone's job. They looked at the three bonds that are pertinent to the development of commitment and trust which are financial bonds, social bonds, and structural bonds. The weakest of these bonds is financial and the strongest of these bonds is structural. The foundation of the social bond is connection, which includes staying in touch, becoming familiar with, and personalizing and customizing communications and transactions (p.342). They purport that social bonds take time and effort to establish, but communication building activities that "lead to strengthening of social bonds may be fairly inexpensive for campuses to promote a culture that values student connection" (p. 342). They believe that social bonding activities are the most abundant of all the activities available on which to build strong relationships with students (p. 325). "Some of the most important social bonding activities include interactions with advisers, teachers and administrators, service learning programs, opportunities to work with faculty on research projects, purposefully directed activities such as clubs and organizations, and other outside of the classroom involving activities" (p. 325). They say that structural bonds are the most difficult to establish, the most enduring, and are often built into the service delivery system. "They complement financial and social bonds and make it inefficient for the customer to end the relationship" (p. 326). Examples of some structural bonding would be to empower students to participate in a decision-making role either in their own education or for policies of the institution. The end goal of relationship building and therefore this relationship marketing or retention management program is to develop students whose loyalty to the institution prevents their departure. "The goal is to find out what really matters to the students, anticipate their needs, and find ways to add value" (p. 329).

Ahuna et al. researched the relationship, if any, with students completing a Methods of Inquiry (MOI) class and retention. They recognized the research done on student retention, showing how students needed to be integrated both socially and academically to their institutions. Colleges have had success when



they employ first-year seminars, learning communities, and have established student support services. Is it possible that colleges can increase retention by employing a program focusing on academic skills, namely that of critical thinking? They looked at the MOI course that provided overt instruction about learning and thinking processes so students can take control of their academic lives. This course is a three credit elective but some groups of students, like athletes, may be directed to take this course. The course consisted of two 50-minute lectures each week where active strategies for learning were employed. These strategies are: understand your course, get involved with the material, think like your teacher, and pay attention to your comprehension (p. 252). They found that students who have completed MOI are approximately twice as likely to be retained, or to have graduated, than those students who have not taken MOI (p. 255).

The last two strategies focus on intervention. Seidman (2005) prescribes a formula of identifying the “at risk” student both before and after enrollment by using information about the student such as demographics, GPA, SAT and ACT scores before enrollment, and academic performance identified by faculty after enrollment. Once the student is identified then the situation can be diagnosed and a prescription for action given. Seidman (2005) mandates that intervention should happen and that the prescribed course of action must be taken by the student. If the student denies that intervention is needed, he or she can enter an appeals process. The point is to intervene early, intensively, and continuously.

Nelson et al. utilized a Student Success Program (SSP) that identifies the “at risk” student and is one component in a first-year engagement program (FYEP). The focus of the SSP is to build bridges for “at risk” students between class experiences and discussions, and to make available specialist support services to assist them with learning or management of the issues that are affecting their learning. There are four campaigns to this program: (1) pre-semester, (2) weeks one through four, (3) during the semester, and (4) end semester. During each campaign, calls to students were made advising students, or explaining programs. Within this student support program a custom contact management system is utilized. Students at risk are identified, then through a consolidated view of their profile based on a range of descriptors such as: (a) cohort membership, (b) attendance participation in face-to-face and online activities, (c) submission (or not) of assessment items and (d) pass and fail marks are notified (if they qualified as “at risk”). With this program student success advisors are trained to speak with the students over the phone and are often given scripts as to how to guide the students. The FYEP, with the SSP within it, is an example of “transition pedagogy based on the students’ engagement in learning, facilitated by academic professional partnerships and shared understandings of cross institutional processes, is institution wide and has been rigorously evaluated and shown to have a positive impact on student success and retention” (pp.94-95).

In summary, the key components to a successful program include campus-wide participation in focusing on student success while utilizing assessments measuring the students’ readiness, and activities and skills for relationship building at all levels. Enhancing critical thinking or self-efficacy is also a potent strategy which is mostly accomplished through coursework used in tandem with a first-year program.

The above programs do a decent job of addressing the social and academic transition issues that directly affect the retention rate. Where I think they fall short is in the connection of students’ values and experiences with the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and demands for critical thinking and non-traditional ways of knowing and learning, thus lacking in their ability to show the relevancy of the students’ learning and experiences. I believe by applying an integrally informed program utilizing AQAL (Wilber, Patton, Leonard, and Morelli, 2008) to a first year program this gap will be filled.

### **The Solution**

AQAL is a map of consciousness, the Kosmos, and human development, at every level and in every dimension that presents itself. Technically speaking, AQAL is a map of maps, or a meta-theory that

incorporates the core truths from hundreds of other theories. It organizes the profound insights of the spiritual traditions, philosophy, modern science, developmental psychology, and many other disciplines, into a coherent whole. AQAL accounts for the many perspectives that great thinkers, teachers, and researchers have brought to our understanding of self and world. But it doesn't stop there, because AQAL is also intuitive – it describes the terrain of your own awareness. You don't need high tech equipment or an advanced degree to enjoy the benefits of AQAL-informed perspective. All you need is to bring a new kind of awareness to your lived experience. (Wilber et al., 2008, p.10).

Sean Esbjorn-Hargens, a leading scholar in integral education, expresses that “integral education emerges from a desire to continually: engage in action in the world as skillfully as possible; inquire into one's interior space along the entire spectrum of experience; participate compassionately with various worldviews; and support the health and dynamism of global systems” (2007, p.93). Anne Adams, another prominent integral educator agrees stating, “An integral education is purposely designed to focus attention on students' awareness of themselves, through an approach that attends to development of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual domains” (2010, p.4).

The first step to bringing integral education powered by AQAL, in order to increase student success and address all the problems mentioned above, could be to introduce an integral first-year program. Working from the Integral Life Practice (ILP) model (Wilber, et al., 2008), a course designed for student success at the State College of Florida, and several best practices integral educators are using, I envisioned a first-year program. This program is a work in progress but I would like to discuss the necessary key components and describe the overall layout that this program could take. Before I do that, however, a brief description of AQAL is in order. The best description of AQAL and its use in education that I know of is presented by Esbjorn-Hargens in both, the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* (2007), and Chapter One in *Integral Theory in Action* (2010). I summarize what he says about AQAL here:

AQAL is shorthand for all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states, and all-types. These five components represent the basic patterns of reality that recur in multiple contexts. All-quadrants refers to the basic perspectives an individual can take on reality which include the interior and the exterior of individuals and collectives, and are often summarized as the following four dimensions: (1) the upper left or UL is experience (“I”, subjectivity), (2) the lower left or LL is culture (“We”, intersubjectivity), (3) the upper right or UR is behavior (“It”, objectivity), and (4) the lower right or LR is systems (“Its”, interobjectivity). Each of these perspective-dimensions is irreducible and has its own validity claim. The UL quadrant's validity claim is truthfulness, the UR quadrant's validity claim is truth, the LL quadrant's validity claim is justness (goodness), and the LR quadrant's validity claim is functional fit. The next four elements of the integral model arise in each of the four quadrants: all-levels refers to the occurrence of complexity within each dimension, such as levels of physical complexity achieved by evolution in the UR quadrant; all-lines refers to the various distinct capacities that developed through each of these levels of complexity such as, developmental capacities of cognition, emotions, and morality; all-states refers to the temporary occurrence of any aspect of reality within the four quadrants such as occurrence of weather states in the LR quadrant; and all-types refers to the variety of styles that aspects of reality assumed in various domains such as personality types in the UL quadrant, or types of festivals in the LL (2007).

I realize this is complex and hardly enough information to explicitly describe how AQAL works, suffice it to say part of the integral first-year program (IFYP) is to spend several weeks expanding and applying each of the AQAL elements to the students' lives and coursework. The point to be made here is that integral theory is a

comprehensive study of reality, which weaves together the significant insights from all the major human disciplines of knowledge acquisition, including the natural and social sciences as well as the arts and humanities...(It is also) an approach to personal transformation and integration...allowing individuals to systematically explore and develop multiple aspects of themselves such as the physical body, emotional intelligence, cognitive awareness, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual wisdom. Because Integral theory systematically includes more of reality and interrelates it more thoroughly than any other current approach to assessment and solution building, it has the potential to be more successful in dealing with complex problems we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (EsbjornHargens, 2010, p. 34).

By utilizing the AQAL framework, one is able to view an object or problem from multiple perspectives. AQAL insists that all perspectives are true and partial and can only be proven valid by the validity claim of the quadrant from which the perspective arose. By teaching this concept and how to utilize the quadrant perspectives, the heavy handedness of scientific method and traditional adherence and allegiance to objective reality as the only true reality can be broken without neglecting the importance and truth of those perspectives. Other subjective and intersubjective realities or truths can be explored and honored in the same free manner. Fuhs(2010) describes the beauty and importance of perspective taking stating, "The capacity for perspective taking enables humans to understand and experience reality as it is seen and felt by others...From cognitive to interpersonal and affective to self-sense, development in many domains progresses in accordance with an individual's ability to take perspectives" (p. 273). This perspective taking framework addresses the three problems outlined above: social integration or valuing of the students' experiences, academic integration or the move from transmission-based learning to a more critical thinking type of learning, and the twenty-first century demands to move away from compartmentalized learning and to include alternative ways of knowing in the learning process. Integral educator Linda Feldman purports that by using the AQAL methodology,

*the content* of learning would enable the embrace of inter-and trans-disciplinary educational systems. No longer being isolated within artificially compartmentalized knowledge, all learners would be freed within a content free framework to deal robustly with the severe interdependent challenges of our present and near future. *The context* of learning would at last reunite values, ethics, morals, aesthetics, and science... *The process* of learning would emphasize active, experiential, and collaborative learning as well as concrete problem solving in real world situations (2007, p. 38, 39).

I couldn't agree more.

An important feature of the Integral approach is that it brings the individual using it to a deeper understanding of who they really are and are meant to be. There is a coming home to your true higher-Self when you employ AQAL or the Integral approach. The most prominent personal development author Stephen R. Covey (*The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*, 2004) explains the current need to be more than just a great personality. He talks about the transformation we must make from the personality ethic to the character ethic. Our diverse global technological world needs men and woman that we trust, they must have the character ethic necessary to work with others and solve complex issues. The Integral approach is the best approach currently available for bringing about the transformation necessary.

### **The IFYP Basics**

A first-year course might look something like this description from the State College of Florida Catalog (2013) regarding the First-year Experience Course SLS1106. "This course assists students in mapping essential resources necessary for college success. The focus of this course is to promote academic success and persistence, active collaboration with college personnel, effective educational planning, and



student engagement in college life” (SCF Website). This course assists students by providing information about the various offices and services available on campus that can assist them financially and academically, strategies for studying and balancing life’s demands, guidance with tutoring and mentoring, and alerting them to various activities, clubs and events that they can participate in on campus. It goes much deeper than that by instilling an Integral Life practice which is to say the student explores themselves and discovers the strengths and limitations of their learning and expression, then expands their capacity to think critically and multi-perspectively along with enhancing their ability to work as a valuable team member. By overlaying AQAL concepts onto the first year experience course, the entire first year will be significantly enhanced. The following is my 32 week (two semesters or one year) program utilizing AQAL as its map; it is extremely pared down just giving the basics. The 32 weeks are broken into eight 4-week modules. Weeks 1-16 focus mainly on the individual (UL and UR) quadrants and a basic introduction to AQAL. Weeks 17-32 focus more on the collective quadrants and self-directed study. At the end of each 4-week module a reflection paper will be due analyzing what has been learned and how that effects or relates to the student’s education, life, or goals.

Weeks 1-4: focus on the UL

1. Introduction to AQAL basics. Utilize Esbjorn-Hargens 2007 and 2010. Utilize class time to field questions and inform students on various campus offices and programs to aid them in their financial and academic endeavors. Assign chapter 3 in *Integral Life Practice* and discuss the basics of AQAL.
2. Focus on quadrants, what is the student’s preference? Utilize an activity by Schmidt (2012) on taking perspectives on a personal belief about the HEI.
3. Focus on types. Assess students with Meyers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Enneagram.
4. Focus on states. Teach and practice different meditation techniques.

Weeks 5-8 focus on UL and UR quadrants

5. Continue AQAL basics. Read chapter 5 (Mind module) in *Integral Life Practice*. Assign “formulating your personal ILP”.
6. Discuss quadrants and validity claims and utilize exercise by Feldman (2007) that looks at a current topic of student interest from all four quadrant perspectives.
7. Assess learning styles as types. Recognize strengths and weaknesses.
8. Focus on the upper right the body, and the immediate student environment(s). Read chapter 6 (Body module) in *Integral Life Practice*. Assign: Continuation of formulating your personal ILP

Weeks 9-12: focus on development

9. Discuss lines of intelligence. Utilize various authors who are seen as experts in particular lines. These lines are discussed in *Integral Life Practice*.
10. Discuss levels of consciousness. Utilize Ken Wilber’s altitudes of consciousness as described in *Integral Life Practice*.
11. Read and discuss chapter 4 (Shadow module) in *Integral Life Practice*.
12. Read and discuss chapter 7 (Spirit module) in *Integral Life Practice*. Assign: Continuation of formulating your personal ILP.

Weeks 13-16: focus on the “We” space, or lower left quadrant

13. The “We” space defined in *Integral Spirituality*
14. Discover and discuss shared interior spaces on campus.
15. Discover and discuss shared worldviews. Utilize Fowler and Gebser (through assigned readings from Ken Wilber) to discover different categories of worldviews.

16. Review the course by creating a psychograph. Collect completed personal ILPs from students.

Modules 5 – 8 or weeks 17 – 32 are described briefly here.

Module 5, weeks 17-20. Students will review weeks 13 – 16. Then they will begin work on the LR or systems quadrant discovering and discussing the costs and benefits to themselves and the societies we all live in.

Module 6, weeks 21-24. Students will discuss the tetra-arising and tetra-allowing principle of all four quadrants. Next they will read and discuss chapter 8 in *Integral Life Practice* on Integral Ethics. The next two weeks they will reflect on who they have been and who they want to become in relation to the world.

Module 7, weeks 25-28. Students will work independently on a self-directed project that will result in ILP and AQAL next steps plan that they will share with the cohort/class.

Module 8, weeks 29-32. Students will present their AQAL-ILP plans to the class in 5 – 7 minute presentations. These presentations will be of their own design utilizing their individual strengths.

Connections to classwork, campus, and community will be made throughout the course as those will become objects for discussion. Each class will be designed to incorporate body, mind, and spirit or shadow activities that are outlined in *Integral Life Practice: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Blueprint for Physical Health, Emotional Balance, Mental Clarity, and Spiritual Awakening* (2008). There will be two hours of face-to-face time with one hour of online time required each week. Each 16 week course is designed to be worth 3 credit hours and course one is a pre-requisite for course two. Of course this course can be modified to fit the needs of the institution.

## Conclusion

The first-year program I described above is a good start and can stand alone but it should be supported by the entire HEI to ensure its longevity. Ideally administrators, faculty, staff, and students would be introduced to the basic concepts of AQAL, understanding the perspectival nature of themselves and the HEI. Seminars should be provided to show those not directly involved in the teaching and learning of the first-year program what is being taught and why. The institution, again ideally, should see the value of transformative learning and adopt that goal in their mission or core values. If the students see the commitment the HEI has toward their success, they will feel valued. This takes every department, every person every day. A good model to follow for increasing loyalty and trust within a business or college culture was developed by Teri Yanovitch and Dennis Snow.<sup>iii</sup> The goal of the program is to create loyalty to the institution from inside out. Adopting this, or similar institutional wide initiatives that can infuse AQAL concepts and methods, the HEI would be able to completely support a first-year program like IFYP.

Based on the belief that “The Integral model is not simply the wave of the future in the academy (and it) is the vision already before it that the academy needs in order to reform society at large (Crittenden, 2007, p.3)” and, “Our ability to transform our consciousness is the fount from which a global ethic to help us navigate the twenty-first century can spring” (Martin, 2010, p. 268), I am sure that utilizing an AQAL first year program like the one I outlined is the best program currently available for increasing retention and for helping adults transform themselves in order to be relevant and effective problem-solvers within the twenty-first century environment. This IFYP could be the first step to bringing AQAL to the HEI’s that are still operating well within the systems and frameworks that have been holding them back, bringing them a method to break out of restrictive practices and pedagogy.

### Further Study

There is no empirical proof that by employing an AQAL driven first year program it will be any more effective in retaining students than first year programs being currently used. However, the reports made by integral (AQAL) practitioners in their various disciplines of study do indicate that this approach to self-development and learning brings valuable awareness to learners that in turn allow them to engage in creative, respectful, enlightening, and community empowering decision making. They know they are valuable assets to the communities in which they belong. The articles written by integral practitioners in *Igniting Brilliance* (Dea, 2011), *Integral Education* (Esbjorn-Hargens, Reams, & Gunnlaugson, Eds., 2010), and *Integral Theory in Action* (Esbjorn-Hargens Ed., 2010) provide both practices utilized and results found by the practitioners in their classroom or work environments. The implications of applying an Integral approach to education are astounding and providing a course in the first year of college study that can bring the student the self-awareness of their unique and necessary value in their communities, I think, is a promising first step for higher education.

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<sup>i</sup> *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, theory, and practice*.

<sup>ii</sup> Several studies refer to one or more of the following of Tinto's work:

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd edn). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1995). *Educational communities and student success in the first year of university*. Paper prepared for the Conference on the Transition from Secondary School to University. Melbourne: Monash University.

<sup>iii</sup> The program is described in their 2010 book *Unleashing Excellence: The complete guide to ultimate customer service*. Hoboken, NJ. John Wiley and Sons.