



The Council of
Independent Colleges

Building Places
of Promise:
**Unlocking
Student
Success**

2025 Institute for Chief Academics Officers with
Chief Student Affairs Officers and Chief Student Success Officers
November 1–4, 2025 🗝️ JW Marriott, Indianapolis, IN

Recruitment and Retention: Hot Potato or Opportunity for Collaboration?



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Building Places of Promise:
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Presenters

- Chair: **Noah Toly**, Provost and Chief Academic Officer
Calvin University (MI)
- **Gretchen Galbraith**, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs
Saint Michael's College (VT)
- **Elizabeth Davies**, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs
Rockford University (IL)
- **Meredith Raimondo**, Vice President of Student Affairs
Oglethorpe University (GA)



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Hot Potato or Opportunity for Collaboration?

This panel will explore perspectives on collaborating within an institution to advance recruitment and retention, two of the leading challenges that we face in higher education. Effectively addressing these challenges requires building trust across institutional stakeholders.

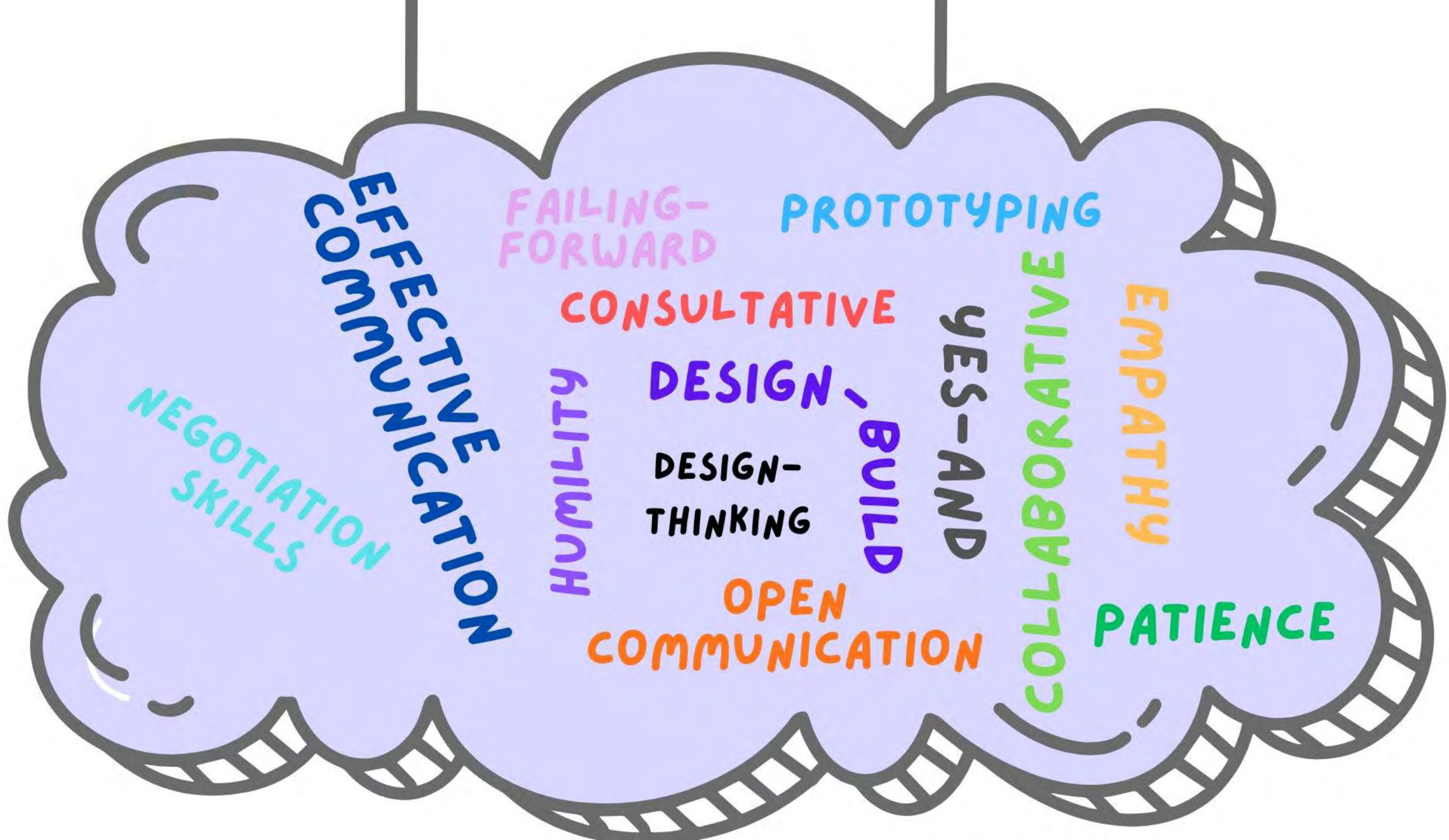


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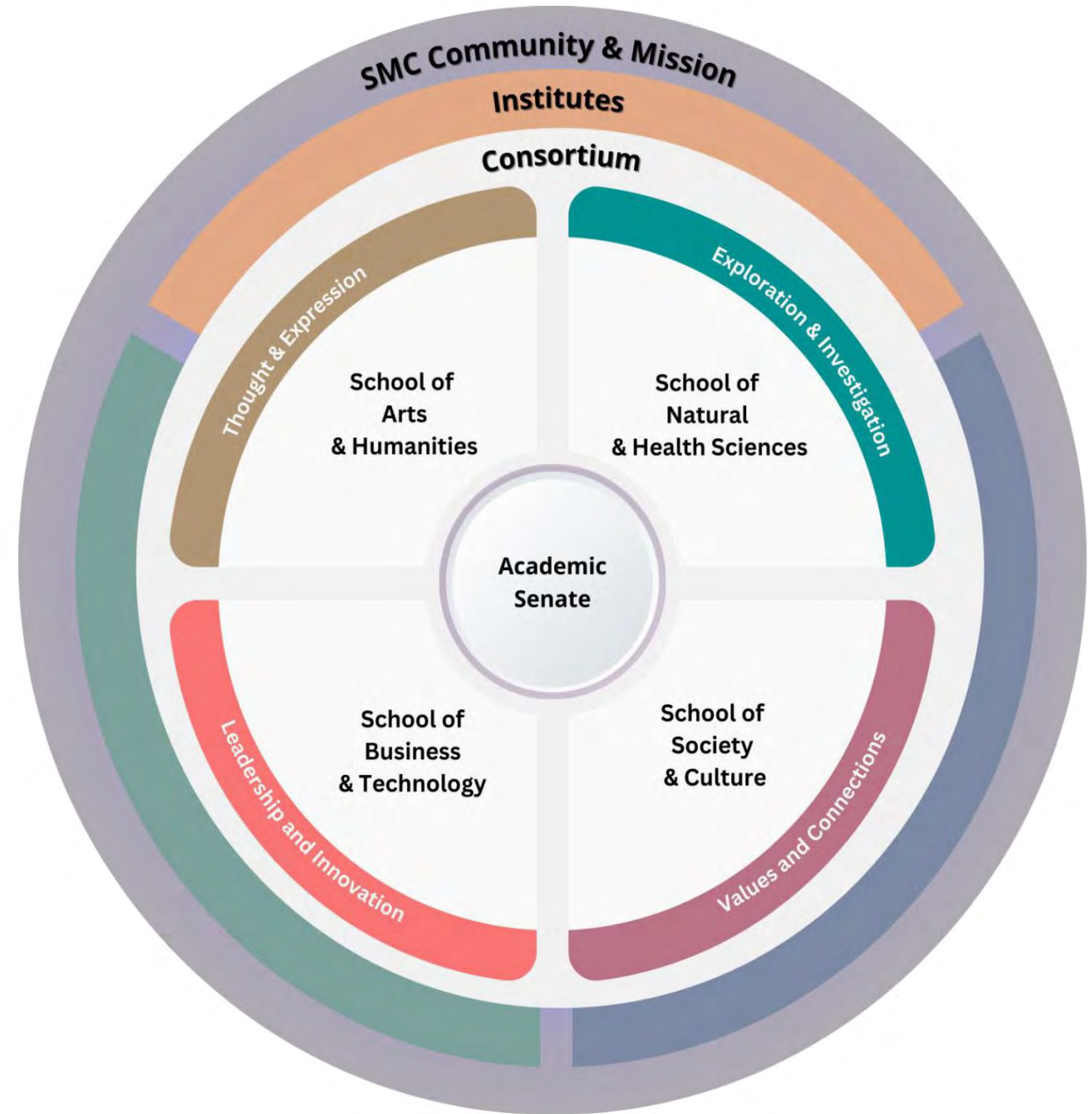


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Case Study

Reworking the Admissions & Academic Affairs partnership in the context of a restructuring of Academic Affairs and turnover in Admissions.



Mindsets for Building Trust & Partnerships in a Context of Constant Change

- Design-build, design-thinking, prototyping
- Collaborative, consultative, willingness to negotiate
- Humility, openness, empathy
- Patience for an iterative process with a revolving cast of partners
- Kindness is a strategy

Introduction



Source: [OpenAI](#). (2025, October 16). *Create an image of adult male holding on to leg of college student retention.*
[Generative AI chat]. ChatGPT. https://chatgpt.com/s/m_68f0f88615808191b804c42bb91fa468

Retention by the Numbers

- National context

Four-Year Traditional and Non-traditional Institutions

Outcome Measure	Median	25th Percentile	5th Percentile
Retention Rate	72.34%	64.28%	48.42%
Graduation Rate (150%)	55.50%	43.97%	26.85%
Completion and Transfer Rate	82.10%	70.88%	48.13%

Source: Higher Learning Commission. (2025, September). *Benchmarking and Review of Student Success Outcome Measures* [webinar and video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrLrdKjyqIM>

Retention by the Numbers

- Institutional Context

Institution	Retention Rate	Graduation Rate (150%)	Completion and Transfer Rate
Rockford University	70%	38%	60%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Retention by the Numbers

- Rockford University subpopulations (Fall '24 to Spring '25)

	Rockford Univ. Overall	Rockford Non-athletes	Women's Flag Football Athletes	Men's Football Athletes	Women's Basketball Athletes	Men's Basketball Athletes
Retention Rate	70%	88%	47%	42%	100%	80%

Source: Rockford University Director of Institutional Research and Analytics

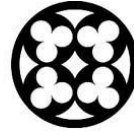
What We Did: A Brief Parable

- Who- Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Admissions, Executive Council
- What- conversations & meetings with stakeholders
- Why- i.e. clarify goals and set reasonable expectations
- How- tools (focused recruitment and support)
- When- to be implemented over a year
- Where- LOCALLY
- Results- ? (Time will tell.)



Conclusion (A Collection of Truisms)

- Study the data
- Convene the stakeholders
- Collaborate (remember *Getting to Yes*, It takes a village, etc.)
- Meet the need where it's at/design and implement an intervention
- Assess
- Repeat



OGLETHORPE
UNIVERSITY

“What Every Student Needs”

Collaboration in Pursuit of Holistic Transformation

Building an Institutional Retention Initiative

- Review data
- Focus on the “big rocks”
- Identify institutional resources
- Reward collaborative innovation



The Student-Ready College

“Student-ready colleges take an intentional, systemic, holistic, and transformative approach to ensuring student learning and ensuring that every student receives what is needed to be successful.

At student-ready colleges, students are responsible for doing the work needed to complete the path to a higher education credential, and the college takes leadership, ownership, and accountability for everything associated with curating the path through the institution and aligning learning and post-college outcomes.

And all activities and services facilitate an equitable opportunity for every student to make steady, efficient progress toward completing their studies and to become fully informed and educated for civic and economic participation in a global, interconnected society.”

--Tia McNair Brown, Susan Albertine, Nicole McDonald, Thomas Major, Jr., and Michelle Asha Cooper,
Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success (2nd ed), p. 6.

What Does the Data Tell Us?

2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
76.23%	73.15%	76.47%	76.24%	79.19%	75.75

% return for spring

F24 – S25	F23 - S24	F22- S23	F21- S22	F20 - S21
88.2%	91.0%	91.5%	91.2%	93.3%

Median retention four-year privates 2023 – 80.9%

Why Do They Leave?

- Top reported reasons for departure:
 - Finances
 - Academic challenges
 - Health concerns
 - Fit
- Additional key findings:
 - Undecided, chemistry, economics, physics, and biology majors most likely to depart
 - The greater the financial aid gap, the more likely to depart
 - Student satisfaction survey identified challenges related to belonging
 - Athletics and student involvement were protective factors



Moving the Big Rocks

Promoting student success through belonging and purpose

- Build holistic web of support
 - Create professional advising unit
 - Develop case management system
- Unpack the hidden curriculum
 - First year seminar relaunched
 - First gen student support unit created
- Enhance student engagement
 - Commuter lounge
 - Intercultural Center
- Clarify value proposition
 - Enhance career readiness
 - Housing scholarships for undergrad research



The Synergy of Academic and Student Affairs

- Identify key student outcomes
- Reward collaboration and innovation
- Demonstrate enthusiasm for the work of the other division
- Demystify the work of the other division
- Give mutual credit – no silos or turf



Q&A



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Thank you for attending this session!



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