



ACT Engage[®] College Training Guide

ACT[®] Engage[®]
College



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Training University Personnel to Use ACT Engage[®] College

Sample Training Program

Using ACT Engage[®] can help institutions identify and intervene with students at risk of dropping out and/or at risk for low academic achievement. Proactive intervention can be customized to your institution, given the existing campus activities and student characteristics at your particular site. This information is provided as a guideline for your institution's implementation. It includes questions and issues to consider.

ACT Engage College is intended to be administered to first-year students at or before the beginning of the first semester of postsecondary education. Early implementation allows for possible intervention with students prior to negative experiences such as earning a failing grade, feeling overwhelming isolation and detachment from social activities, or experiencing incidents involving inability to control emotions such as stress or anger as a result of the transition to college.

Your institution likely has programs in place that address some or all of the areas assessed by ACT Engage. Since it can be overwhelming for students to have multiple services available, we recommend a comprehensive approach that begins with the formation of a task force. This group should include key student life personnel involved in coordinating and providing services for first-year students. The goal of the task force is to (1) comprehensively match existing programs to ACT Engage scales and (2) determine an efficient and effective manner to implement ACT Engage at your particular institution.

Table 1, shown below, can be used as a prototype for how you might crosswalk existing programs with ACT Engage scales. What programs does your school already provide that address each scale of ACT Engage? Is it possible that one program covers multiple areas?

Table 1 Crosswalk of ACT Engage Scales to Campus Resources

Services	ACT Engage Scales									
	Academic Discipline	Academic Self-Confidence	Commitment to College	Communication Skills	General Determination	Goal Striving	Social Activity	Social Connection	Steadiness	Study Skills
Academic tutoring/learning center/lab	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Athletic support services			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Career planning and placement services						✓				
Counseling/psychological services		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
First-year experience/academic success program	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multicultural/international student services			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Recreational sports programs/services							✓	✓		
Residential life services				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Special needs/students with disabilities services	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Student activities/student life services							✓	✓	✓	✓
Women's resource center			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 is an example of how university personnel could match campus programs and program objectives to ACT Engage scales. Examples of program objectives are listed in the table below. A blank copy of this form is available in [Appendix A](#).

Table 2 Institutional Crosswalk

ACT Engage Scale	Existing Program(s)	Specific Program Objectives
Academic Discipline (AD)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students at our campus will understand the importance of prioritizing academic tasks.
Academic Self-Confidence (ASC)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students at our campus will be able to appropriately match instructors' expectations with their own abilities and skills.
Commitment to College (CC)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will understand how college experiences will affect their career choices.
Communication Skills (CS)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will be able to work collaboratively.
General Determination (GD)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will understand the importance of following through on commitments.
Goal Striving (GS)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will set immediate, short-term, and long-term goals.
Social Activity (SA)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students low on SA will be connected with appropriate counseling and/or resources.
Social Connection (SC)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will be connected with at least one recreational, social, cultural, or academic event/program on campus.
Steadiness (S)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will be able to effectively manage their frustration.
Study Skills (SS)	<hr/> <hr/>	Students will be able to use various learning strategies while completing their coursework.

Next, become familiar with this booklet and the resources available with ACT Engage. Form goals for retention and degree completion.

Questions for the task force:

- Given our resources, how will we determine the score cutoff for the students most in need of intervention (e.g., the lowest 25% of ACT Engage scores will include more students than the lowest 15% of ACT Engage scores)?
- How will ACT Engage enhance existing programs on your campus that impact student retention (FYE course, first-year transition programs, academic advising, course placement, etc.)?
- What services does our institution already have that cover areas assessed by ACT Engage?
- Does our institution need to implement new services that cover unaddressed ACT Engage areas?
- Will we have a method in place to identify students who have particular strengths in certain ACT Engage areas (e.g., a student with high communication skills may be a good match for student services such as residence life)?
- What is our institution’s retention goal?
- If a student is identified as needing intervention in multiple areas, how will we ensure that this student does not become overwhelmed?

In an effort to evaluate what works in student retention, Habley and McClanahan (2004) administered a survey to a large sample of colleges that included 4-year public, 4-year private, and 2-year public colleges. Overall, the programs reported as making the greatest contribution to retention across all schools were as follows: academic advising, first-year transition programs, learning support, assessment/course placement, and high-impact programs/services (four-year public colleges). Next, schools were separated by type of institution, which revealed important distinctions between the types of schools. These programs are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 Most Effective Programs for Retention, Reported by Institution Type

Program	2-year	4-year
Freshman Seminar/University 101 for credit	—	17.8%
Mandated course placement testing	20.7%	—
Advising interventions with selected student populations	—	14.8%
Tutoring program	19.3%	—
Required remedial/developmental courses	19.2%	—
Learning communities	—	18.4%
Internships	—	13.5%
Integration of advising with first-year transition programs	—	12.7%
Comprehensive Learning Assistance Center/Lab	19.2%	—

Inclusion of Campus Community into Retention Efforts

Student Services

There are multiple ways that student services can use the information from their ACT Engage reports. First, institutions that have implemented ACT Engage on their campuses have recommended that one of the most helpful features of ACT Engage is that the institution has gained the ability to identify at-risk students early. It is powerful to have the opportunity to make direct contact with students who are identified as at risk for either failure to persist at the institution or failure to remain in good academic standing.

In addition, student services can use ACT Engage scores to match student needs with specific university resources and services by examining students' strengths and weaknesses. For example, students scoring extremely high or low on the *Social Activity* scale may be identified for appropriate services. For the former, students may benefit from time management and how-to-prioritize interventions. For the latter, students may benefit from specific and direct interventions such as personalized invitations to join social clubs with an invitation that speaks to their needs (e.g., Feeling homesick? Come to the campus group activity tonight at the coffee shop!).

Institutions may want to use the retention index to build retention models for your institution. This can be aligned with the institution's retention and success goals.

Peer Advisors

Students who are strong in particular areas may be solicited by various leadership programs on campus (student government, residence life, etc.) to fill various peer advising roles. For example, students at your institution who score at or above the 75th percentile on *Academic Discipline* may be a good match for work in an academic advising program or as a peer tutor. Similarly, students scoring very high on communication skills may be prime candidates for positions in Residence Life.

Faculty

In the classroom, FYE instructors and students can take advantage of ACT Engage results in a variety of ways. Examples include discussions of ACT Engage scales and their implications for college success, one-on-one or group feedback of students' scores, and discussion of action steps that can be taken by students to develop their skills further, thus enhancing their opportunities for success in college. To facilitate action steps, ACT has created an online toolshop that students can use to create action plans. Students are linked directly to the toolshop via their online reports. See page 8 of this guide for additional details on the toolshop website.

Additionally, the FYE instructors can meet one-on-one with students to review the entire ACT Engage report. Based on areas that students selected, an "action plan" can be constructed. The action plan can be developed by selecting university resources and activities to access or attend (e.g., sign up for tutoring or attend a study skills workshop). **Appendix B** provides a template, "Rx for Success," that may be used for this purpose.

Other ACT Engage Resources

ACT Engage Toolshop

ACT has developed an online toolshop to help students develop their skills in areas of need as indicated by ACT Engage. Each Student and Advisor Report includes a link to the toolshop. Students will find several activities listed under each ACT Engage scale. Figure 1 shows the toolshop site.



Figure 1 ACT Engage Toolshop List

Resources on Student Retention

The annotated bibliography identifies publications and presentations regarding the development, norming, validation, and implementation of ACT Engage. It also includes references to important policy reports that are relevant to ACT Engage. This bibliography will continue to expand and grow as ongoing studies are published and as new studies and implementation efforts are created.

Books

Astin, A.W. (1997). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barefoot, B.O., Cutright, M., Morris, L.V., Schroeder, C.C., Schwartz, S.W., Siegel, M.J., Swing, R.L., and Gardner, J.N. (Ed.). (2005). *Achieving and sustaining institutional excellence for the first year of college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Feldman, R.S. (2005). *Improving the first year of college: Research and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., and Whitt, E.J. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Laanan, F.S. (2006). *Understanding students in transition: Trends and Issues: New directions for students services, no. 114*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Upcraft, M.L, Gardner, J.N, and Barefoot, B.O. (Eds). (2004). *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Conferences

Conferences organized by the not-for-profit organization National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition:

- Annual Conferences on the First-Year Experience
- International Conferences on The First-Year Experience
- National Conference on Students in Transition
- Regional and Co-Sponsored Meetings
- Institute for the Success of Student Veterans Institute

Presentations available from past conferences: www.sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/index.html

Maryland Higher Education Retention Conference: <http://sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/maryland-10.31.05.html>

Mailing Lists

First-Year Experience Discussion List – FYE:

<http://listserv.sc.edu/archives/fye-list.html>

Transfer-Year Experience List – TYE:

<http://listserv.sc.edu/archives/tye-list.html>

Sophomore-Year Mailing List – SYE:

<http://listserv.sc.edu/archives/soph-list.html>

Forum for Higher Ed Profession on the Senior Year Experience:

<http://listserv.sc.edu/archives/sye-list.html>

First-Year Assessment List:

<http://listserv.sc.edu/archives/fya-list.html>

Websites

Association of American Colleges and Universities

www.aacu.org

American Association of Community Colleges

www.aacc.nche.edu

American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Commission for Admissions, Orientation, and First-Year Experience

<http://www.myacpa.org/commaofye>

The Chronicle of Higher Education

<http://chronicle.com>

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)

www.nacada.ksu.edu

National Honor Society for First-Year Students, Alpha Lambda Delta

www.nationalald.org

National Orientation Directors Association (NODA)

www.nodaweb.org

National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

www.sc.edu/fye

First-Year Resources (list of links)

www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/index.html

Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education

<http://www.jngi.org/>

Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research (SIHER)

<http://siher.stanford.edu>

UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)

www.heri.ucla.edu

United States Department of Education

www.ed.gov/index.html

Workshops

University 101—Organized by The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

<http://www.sc.edu/univ101/>

Includes:

- Teaching Experience Workshops
- Instructor Preparation Workshops
- Peer Leader Workshops
- Graduate Leader Workshops
- Team Building Workshops

Appendix A

Institutional Crosswalk Template

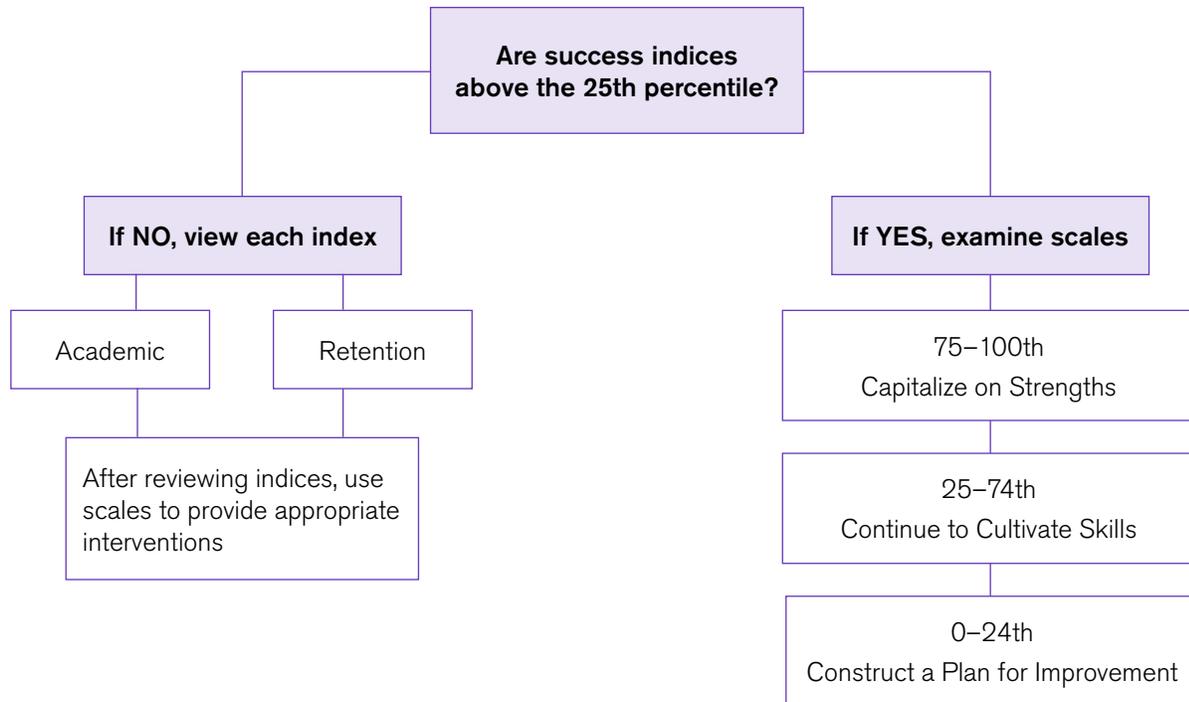
ACT Engage Scale	Existing Program(s)	Specific Program Objectives
Academic Discipline (AD)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Academic Self-Confidence (ASC)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Commitment to College (CC)	<hr/> <hr/>	
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General Determination (GD)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Goal Striving (GS)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Social Activity (SA)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Social Connection (SC)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Steadiness (S)	<hr/> <hr/>	
Study Skills (SS)	<hr/> <hr/>	

Student Crosswalk of Institutional Resources

Scales	Percentile	Resources
Academic Discipline (AD)	High Medium Low	
Academic Self-Confidence (ASC)	High Medium Low	
Commitment to College (CC)	High Medium Low	
Communication Skills (CS)	High Medium Low	
General Determination (GD)	High Medium Low	
Goal Striving (GS)	High Medium Low	
Social Activity (SA)	High Medium Low	
Social Connection (SC)	High Medium Low	
Steadiness (S)	High Medium Low	
Study Skills (SS)	High Medium Low	

Appendix B

Sample Interpretation Protocol



ACT[®]