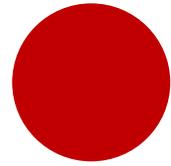


AT-RISK STUDENTS

Ouachita Baptist University



Being “at-risk” in high school is usually characterized by low standardized test scores, a pattern of poor performance in classes, and/or behavior problems. State law requires public schools to accommodate these students.

Being “at-risk” in college is usually characterized by not meeting GPA and/or standardized test criteria for regular admission. Other than being placed in remedial courses, these students are given little or no accommodation.

Studies have shown, however, there are other factors that may put students “at-risk,” many of which arise after students enter college. Often times these issues are not related to intellectual ability – lack of motivation, low self-esteem, unrealistic grade and career expectations, inadequate study and time management skills, and passive learning. Studies also indicate that the advisor is in the best position to identify and address “at-risk” problems.

As an advisor, be aware of the common types of “at-risk” students:

- **Poor choosers** are students whose past choices have a negative impact on them in the present (i.e., dropping out of high school and getting a GED, avoiding college preparatory classes, taking on high credit card debt, and/or having children at a very young age).
- **Adult learners**, or nontraditional students, are often sufficiently prepared but may be out of practice for study skills or not familiar with newer technology. These students are also often “poor choosers.”
- **Ignored students** are passive learners who approach learning as a process of absorption rather than an active event. Excellence eludes them because they have never been taught how to achieve it. They usually blame teachers for their poor performance.
- **ESL students** have a particularly difficult time because of the language barrier, which may also hide other characteristics.
- **Learning disabled students** have a long history of academic struggles. They are often plagued with frustration, low self-confidence, and feelings of helplessness. Their difficulty in college is compounded by the fact that they are no longer being “accommodated.”
- **Users** are students who are not here to learn. They are here to enjoy the fringe benefits of college life – social life, keeping parents happy, avoiding full-time employment,

enjoying independence, athletics, etc. In many cases, users were often very successful high school students.

- **Extreme students** are ones who often require outside help to resolve academic issues. Problems are usually traced to intense, overwhelming issues that may be personal, psychological, or academic. Some enroll in college to escape issues at home, even though their chances at success are low.
- **First generation college students** are the first in the family to attend college. The lack of shared experience to reinforce the importance of education often results in feelings of irrelevancy.
- **Church campers** are students who have unrealistic expectations of college, because they think college will be just like their camp experiences.

As an advisor, you can have a major impact on “at-risk” students by doing the following:

- Help students understand that they are responsible for their own success and that they should blame others for their failures.
- Insist on and explain the need for basic or remedial courses.
- Recognize the importance of transitional phases of student life. The freshman year can be especially pivotal.
- Be aware of course expectations and prerequisites. Be an advocate for your advisees and place them in appropriate courses.
- Recognize that underachievement may be a result of poor adjustment to college life.
- Ask the right questions during advising sessions that go beyond simple “yes” and “no” responses.
- Provide feedback and support, but remind them of their responsibilities.
- Be honest and forthright about the hurdles that they must cross to succeed. Awareness is often the key.
- Be a good listener. Your willingness to listen may be the tipping factor in a student’s success or failure.
- Refer students to appropriate support services.