Improving Student Retention

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Boise State University

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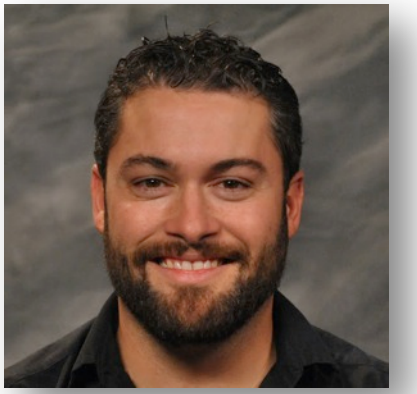
Today's Speakers



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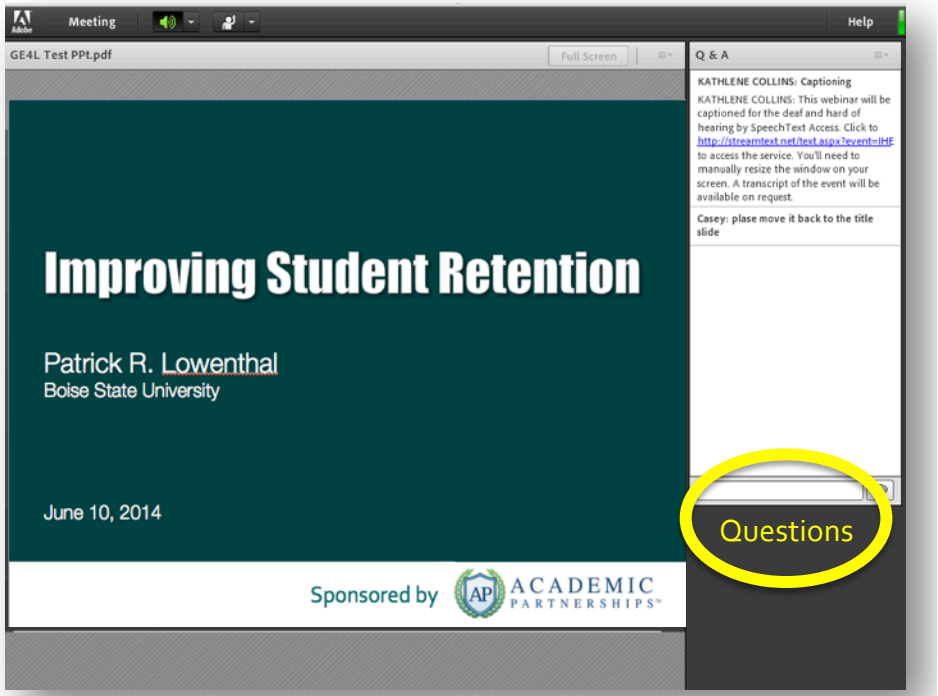
Casey Green, moderator

Founding Director, The Campus Computing Project
Moderator, This Week @ Inside Higher Ed
http://campuscomputing.net

Before We Begin

- We are using Adobe Connect. Please enter questions in the text field at the bottom of the Q&A Window. *We are monitoring the discussion and will try to bring the Q&A comments into the conversation.*
- We will not use the “raise your hand” feature.
- We are recording the webinar; the webinar archive and slides will be available later today.



Background

About Patrick

- educator
- researcher
- designer
- developer

patricklowenthal.com
Twitter @plowenthal

Meet Steve

Busy full-time teacher with a family. He needs a graduate degree to advance up the salary scale and in his career.

Steve started off the semester strong. But about half way through the semester he disappeared. After multiple emails and phone calls he emailed to say he just needed to take an “F” in the course.

Meet Julie

Works for an education publishing company. Just had gave birth to her second child. Started a fully online Ed.D. program to help further advance her career.

Julie was by far one of the strongest students in the program. But one day out-of-the-blue she emailed me to tell me she was dropping out of the doctoral program to spend more time with her family.

QUESTION
EVERYTHING

Online Attrition

“10% - 20%”

higher

1st Poll

At your institution, do online courses have a higher dropout rate than traditional face-to-face courses?

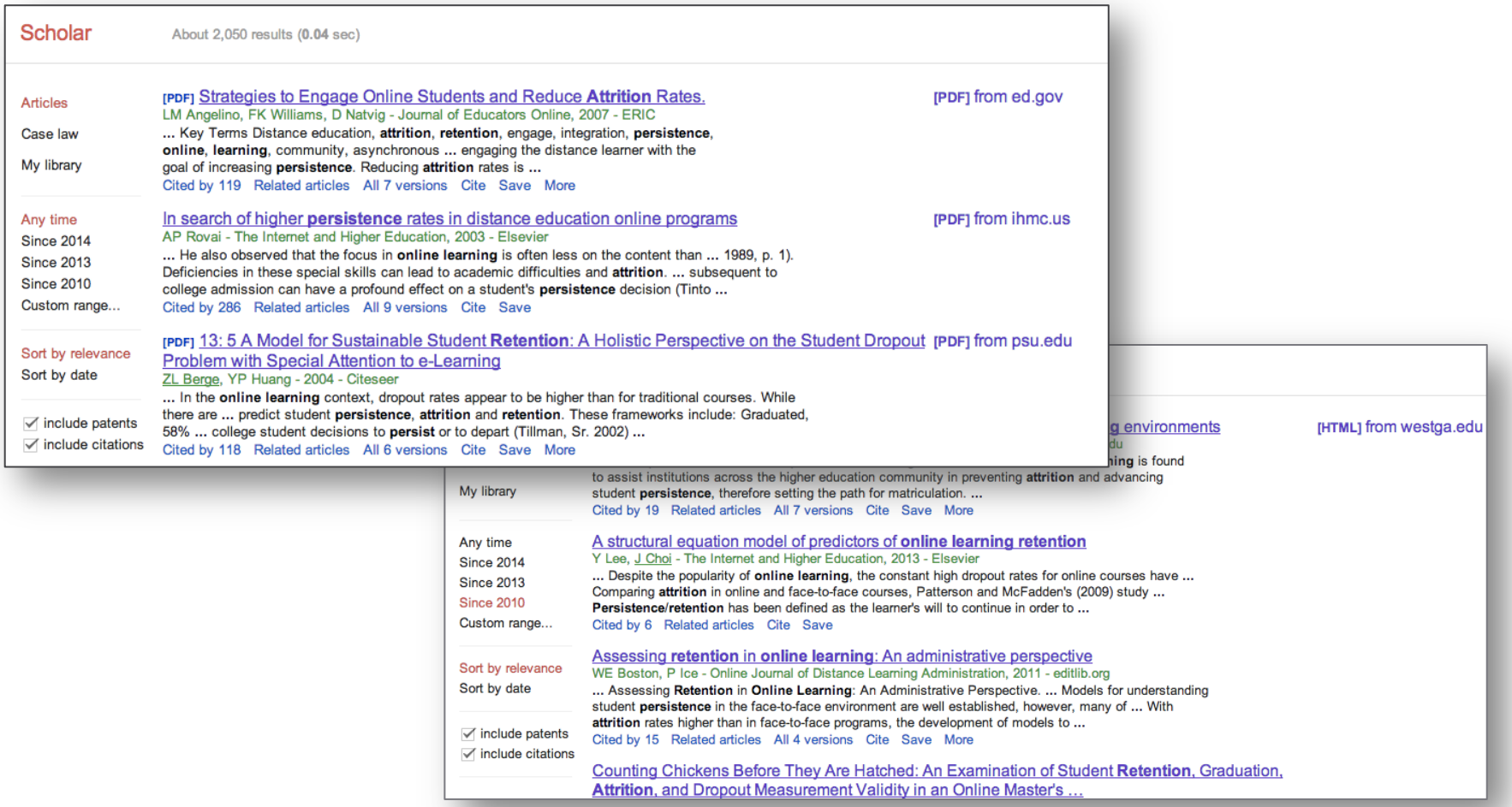
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Research

Practitioner Research Strategies

- Read top 10 cited articles
- Read 10 most recent articles
- Read first page of a “Google” search
- Ask your PLN / Crowd source

Google Scholar's Top 10



Articles reviewed listed @ http://tinyurl.com/online-retention

Word Play

Retention *vs.* Attrition

Persistence

Dropout *vs.* Stop out

Word Play

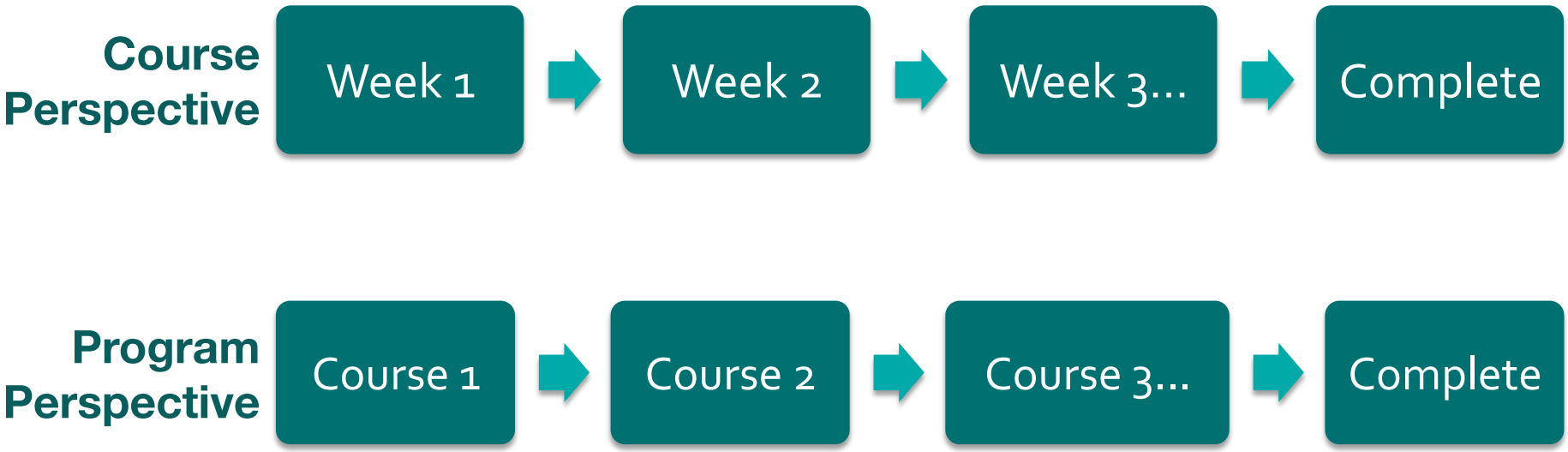
Retention *vs.* Attrition

Persistence

Dropout *vs.* Stop out

What are some other words you have heard or use regarding retention / attrition / persistence?

Course vs. Program Perspectives



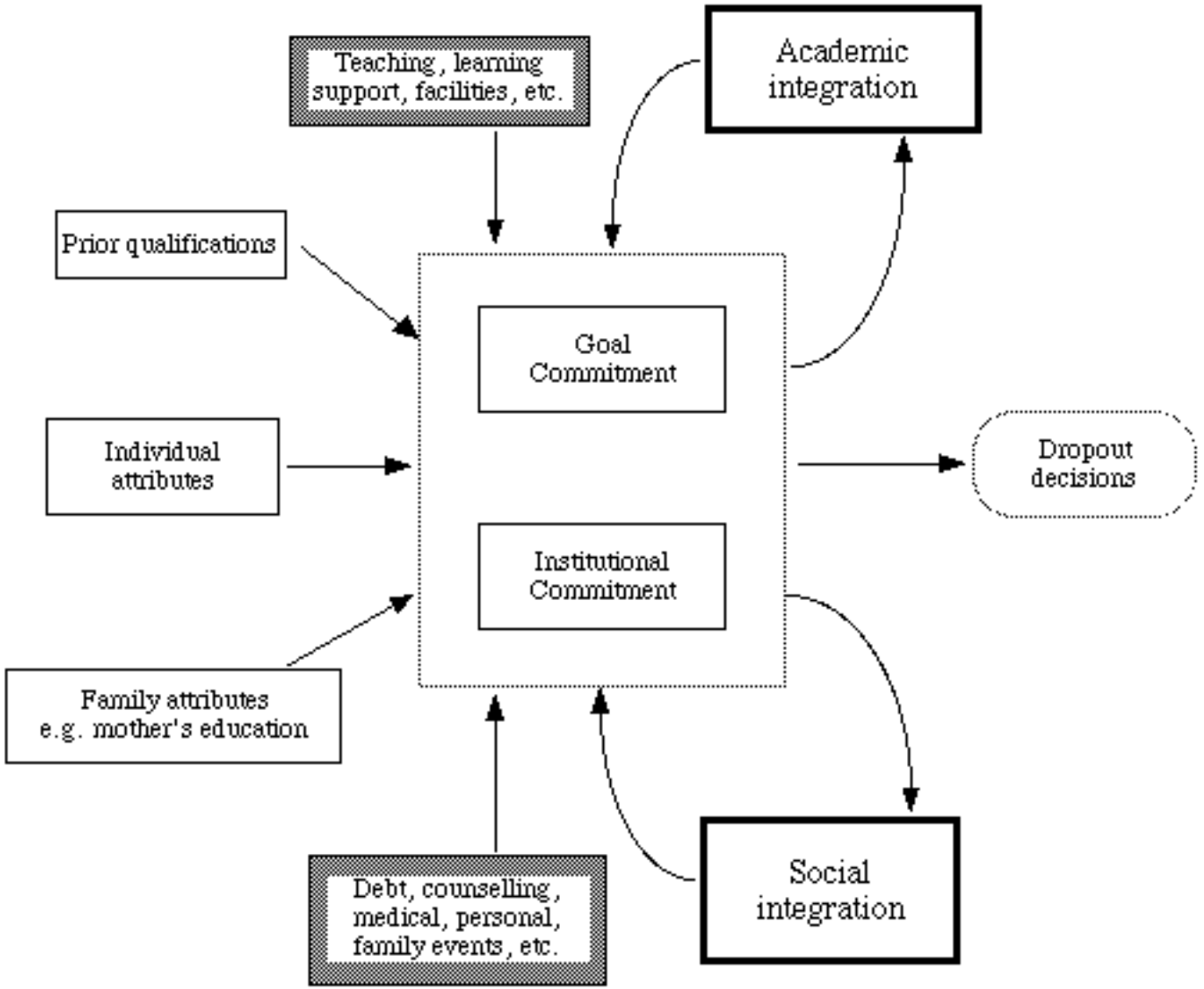
Individuals
Families

So Why Bother?

- **5+ million** students taking courses online
- Online courses take **time & money** to develop
- High attrition is **perceived as low quality**
- Online learning is still seen **inferior than f2f** by many
- We owe it to the Steve & Julie's in our courses / programs

Themes

Tinto's Foundational Work

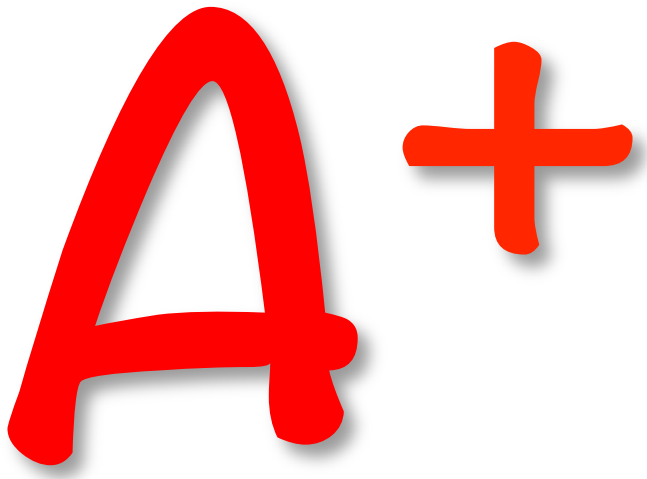


Different Interests

1. How do you **predict** who will persist?
2. Why do students **leave**?
3. What **barriers** are there to learning online?
4. Why do students **stay / persist**?

"Best" Predictors

1. GPA
2. Test Scores



Why They Leave

Berge and Huang:

1. Personal variables;
2. Institutional variables, and
3. Circumstantial variables.

Wang et al:

1. Personal motivation;
2. Instructional design of course/program;
3. Conflicts between study, work, & family; and
4. Learned what they needed or wanted.

Barriers

Berge:

1. Technical problems
2. Cost of & access to internet
3. Time & support for studies
4. Personal motivation
5. Technical skills
6. Academic skills
7. Social interactions
8. Administrative / instructor issues

Müller:

1. Balancing multiple responsibilities
2. Disappointment in faculty
3. F2F learning environment preference
4. Emotional hurdles (e.g. scheduling conflicts; overwhelmed w/ assignments)
5. Technology problems
6. Additional barriers (health, financial issues; time management or procrastination)

Why They Stay

1. Engagement in learning community
2. Feeling challenged and personal growth
3. Schedule flexibility and convenience
4. Support from classmates and faculty
5. Additional factors

Strategies

2nd Poll

Does your college or university or program intentionally do anything to improve retention in online programs?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Share Your Experience

Using the following Google Form, please share what your college or program is doing to help online students persist.

Form: http://tinyurl.com/retention2014

Quick View of Results: http://tinyurl.com/retention2014-results

Complete view of results: http://tinyurl.com/complete2014

Researched-based Strategies

1. Program Orientation
2. Cohorts
3. Clear Expectations
4. Regular faculty-student interaction
5. Social interaction / social presence
6. Student services / support

How Can Faculty Help?

1. Technical problems
2. Cost & access to internet
3. Time & support for studies
4. Personal motivation
5. Technical skills
6. Academic skills
7. **Social interactions**
8. **Instructor issues**

1. Program Orientation
2. Cohorts
3. **Clear Expectations**
4. **Regular faculty-student interaction**
5. **Social interaction / social presence**
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Social Presence Strategies

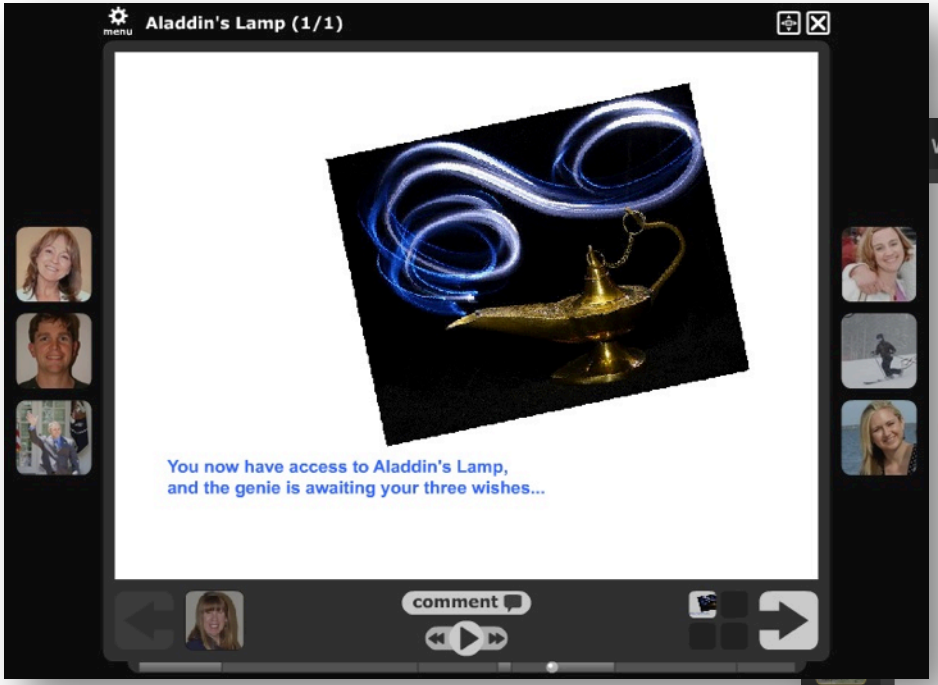
- **Bio** strategies
- **Orientation** strategies
- **Reconnecting** strategies
- **Feedback** strategies
- **Discussion** strategies
- **Small group** strategies
- **Organic interaction** strategies

Teacher Bios

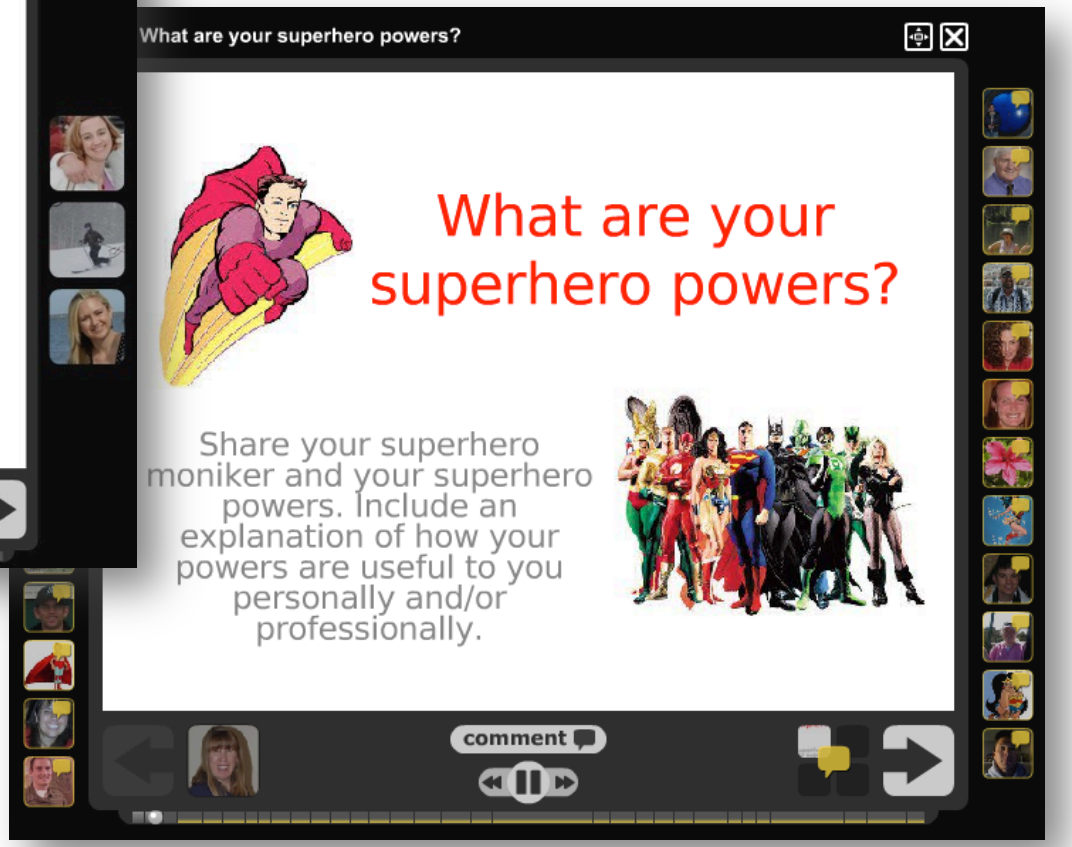
Digital Stories

For more info:
From Pixel on a Screen to Real Person in Your Students' Lives: Establishing Social Presence using Digital Storytelling

Student Bios



Aladdin's Lamp



Superhero Powers

For more info:
Getting to know you: The first week of class and beyond

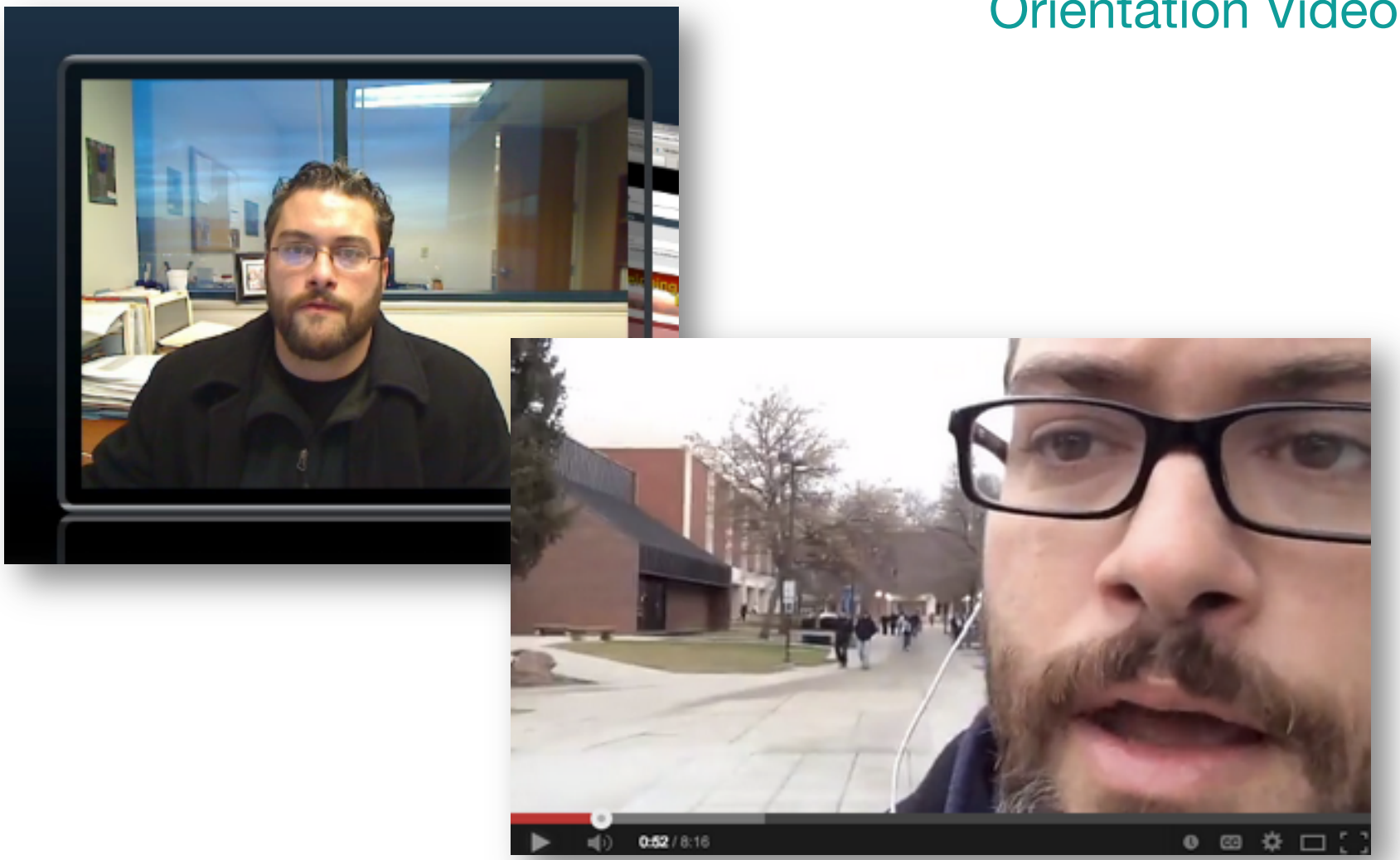
Student Bios

5 minute phone call

For more info:
Defeating the Kobayashi Maru: Supporting Student Retention by Balancing the Needs of the Many and the One

Orientation Strategies

Orientation Videos



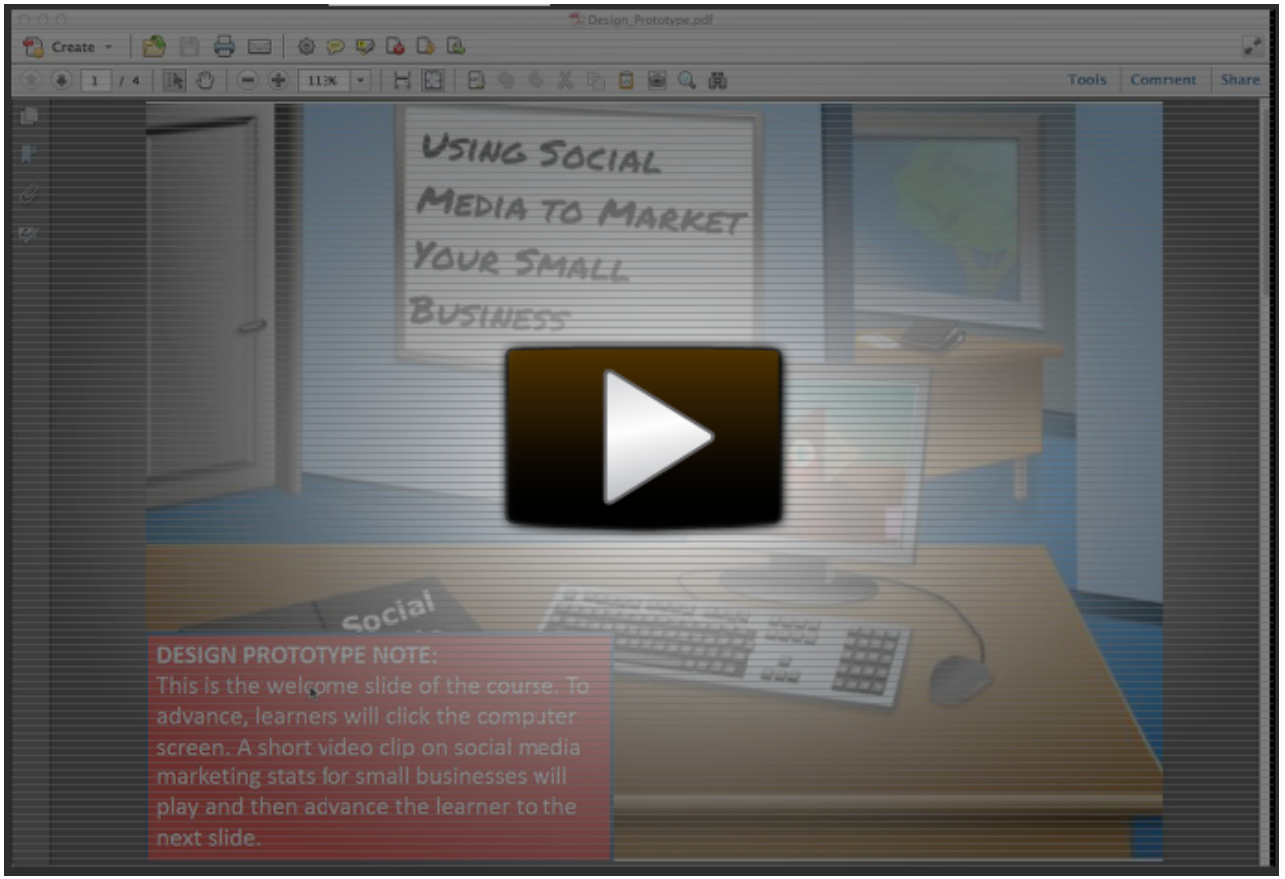
Reconnecting Strategies

Soundtrack of your life

For more info:
Hot for teacher: Using digital music to enhance student's experience in online courses

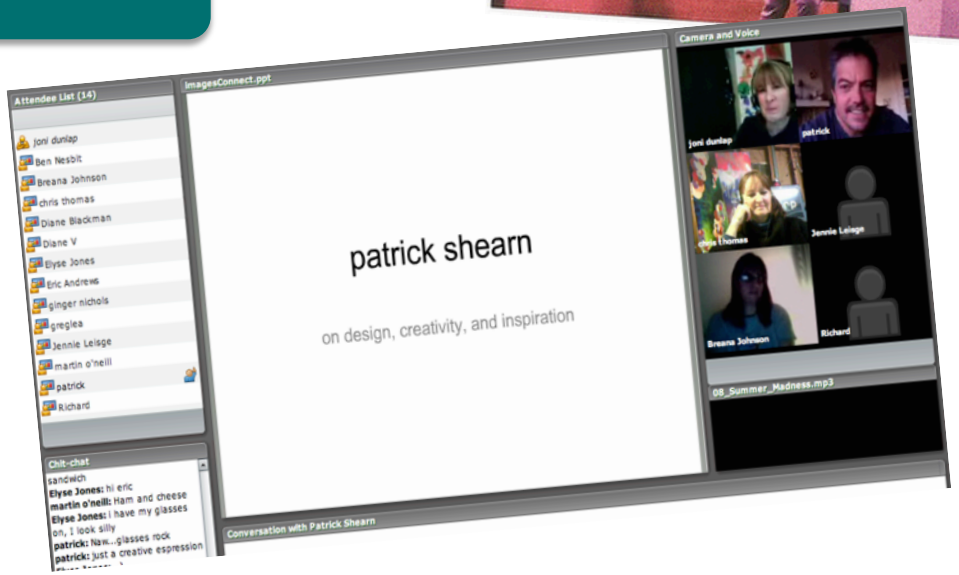
Feedback Strategies

Video Feedback



Discussion Strategies

- Non-threatening discussions
- Discussion Protocols
- Synchronous Discussions



For more info:
Protocols for Online Discussions
http://cuonline.ucdenver.edu/handbook

Tips to Building Presence

- One-to-one communication matters
- Low tech strategies can help
- Past/future relationships matter
- Group projects can help
- Small groups
- One size doesn’t fit all

Conclusion

"It Takes a Village..."

1. Retention is everybody's job
2. One size doesn't fit all
3. Sometimes not completing a course is ok
4. Every instructor can add "social" elements to their courses
5. Faculty should be tracking their percentage of completers!

So what's your number?

Don't know it? Go find it & improve it!

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Articles @ http://patricklowenthal.com/research/

- The power of presence: Our quest for the right mix of social presence in online courses
- What was your best learning experience? Our story about using stories to solve instructional problems
- Examining faculty motivation to participate in faculty development
- Developing a tool for assessing student readiness for online learning: A validation study
- Minority college students and tacit "Codes of Power": Developing academic discourses and identities
- Defeating the Kobayashi Maru: Supporting student retention by balancing the needs of the many and the one
- Death to the Digital Dropbox: Rethinking student privacy and public performance
- Digital campfires: Innovations in helping faculty explore the online learning wildness
- Hot for teacher: Using digital music to enhance student's experience in online courses
- From pixel on a screen to real person in your students' lives: Establishing social presence using digital storytelling
- Horton hears a tweet
- Tweeting the night away: Using Twitter to enhance social presence
- Online faculty development and storytelling: An unlikely solution to improving teacher quality
- Teaching presence