QLESS™

CAMPUS WITHOUT LINES:

How respecting students' time improves student retention, satisfaction rates, and resource management

About the Author

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With more than 20 years experience in higher education, Ms. Kliner oversees education technology solutions at QLess. Over the last 5 years, she has focused on college resource management, student retention, and the campus experience at both community colleges and large-scale universities.

Help More Students Graduate

Anna was having a rough day. A change in her family's financial situation meant she had to speak to someone about adjusting her financial aid. She also needed to talk to her English professor during office hours about an assignment. And she had to get to her job by 4pm. She headed to Student Services, and the line was out the door. She joined the line, hoping it would move quickly. After half an hour, she knew she couldn't meet with her professor. After another half hour, she had a dilemma – stay in line and risk being fired for being late to work – or leave the line to go to work without adjusting her financial aid. Either way, she might not be able to afford to stay in school. And even if she figured out the finances, could she pass her English class?

Colleges want their students to graduate – it's part of their mission. Unfortunately, about a third of all undergraduate students in public and private nonprofit colleges drop out without obtaining a certificate or degree. The cost of attrition for colleges is significant. According to American Institutes for Research, 20 percent of education and related spending in higher education results from institutional costs associated with attrition – the spending per student on credits that do not attach to a degree or certificate.[1] That's why colleges are actively looking for solutions that help students stay enrolled.

What causes students to drop out? A study by The Educational Policy Institute found that the top two reasons are:

1. Students perceive that the college doesn't care about them
2. Students are unhappy with poor service and treatment[2]

The students at the greatest risk of dropping out are the ones working two jobs and taking care of family members while trying to stay on top of their course load. These students don't have any time to spare. When they need to register for classes, apply for financial aid, or speak with a counselor, they are more likely to give up if they need to wait in a long line.

With QLess student interaction management solutions, students don't need to stand in line. The queue is online, so students can attend to other business as they wait their turn, knowing that the system will keep them informed of their status on their mobile device. Colleges can demonstrate that they care about students, show that they respect students' time, and provide better services and treatment – addressing the top reasons that lead students to drop out.

> *"With QLess, we are not only able to see how many students used advising services, but who they are, how often they use that service, and how those services correlate to their academic performance. With this information we are able to continuously improve the quality of the services we provide."*
>
> **Dr. Rolando García**
> **South Campus President**
> **Broward College**
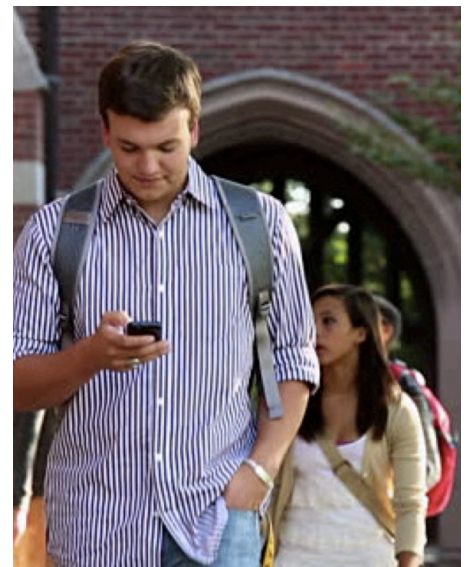
1. Delta Cost Project, "The Institutional costs of Student Attrition," Nate Johnson, Sept, 2012. http://www.deltacostproject.org/sites/default/files/products/Delta-Cost-Attrition-Research-Paper.pdf
2. The Educational Policy Institute, "The Cost of College Attrition at Four-Year Colleges & Universities," Neil Raisman, February, 2013. http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/1302_PolicyPerspectives.pdf

Eliminate Lines for Happier Students

Anna stayed in line and finally made it to the front – annoyed, anxious, and in a hurry to get to her job. Because the college had a one-stop shop model for student services, Anna met with the next staffer available, not an expert in financial aid. The staffer was distracted by the long line of students and upset from dealing with angry remarks from students who were irritated by the long wait. The staffer did not solve Anna's problem and asked her to come back the next day. After wasting an hour with nothing to show for it, Anna arrived late for work.

College students with higher satisfaction scores are 80% more likely to stay in school and graduate.[3] How can colleges increase student satisfaction? Showing respect for students' time and making student services convenient can make a big difference. When UT Dallas launched QLess, the Student Affairs department went from being the top source of complaints to the dean to the lowest within the first year of deployment.

It's not just about saving time. The quality of the services delivered to students also matters. Many colleges are moving to a "one-stop shop" model for student services, with a single department taking on the role of the bursar, the registrar, and the work study and financial aid offices.

With this model, staff members are generalists and may not have the in-depth knowledge to address all student issues. QLess systems can match student issues with the right staff skill sets (including language spoken) to make sure that appointments are productive, increasing student satisfaction.

Most importantly, in order to improve, colleges must measure student satisfaction. Students often ignore paper or emailed surveys. The QLess system surveys students using SMS texts, which millennials check all the time. This increases the response rate – one college that switched to QLess increased survey responses from 100 to 1,500 in the same period of time.

> *"With QLess, we now gather meaningful survey responses and data that we were unable to capture before. The level of satisfaction from our students has climbed significantly."*
>
> **Doug Willis**
> **Dean of Student Development**
> **Collin College**

Improve Student
Satisfaction
Up To:

100%

Boost Resource
Efficiencies
Up To:

90%

Accelerate Student
Retention
Up To:

75%

3. Noel-Levitz, "Linking Student Satisfaction and Retention," Laurie Schreiner, 2009.
https://www.ruffalonl.com/documents/shared/Papers_and_Research/2009/LinkingStudentSatis0809.pdf

Improve Resource Management and Staff Morale

The director of Student Services was frustrated. There had been no students in the office a few hours ago, and the staffers had nothing to do. Now the line was out the door, everyone was aggravated, and the employees would have to stay late. Again. The director knew that the students were unhappy with the long wait times, and he wanted to ask his boss for additional funding to increase staffing levels, but there was no budget available.

Schools are under pressure to spend less on administration and more on academics. But studies have shown that investing in student services increases graduation rates.[4] How can schools provide better services and make the most of limited resources?

A best practice is to collect data on how students use services, and improve resource scheduling based on demand. QLess is not just about eliminating lines. It also provides detailed metrics that make it a powerful workforce management solution. The platform lets managers understand which services are needed at which times so they can set staffing levels accordingly – and encourage students to come during less busy times. It also lets managers measure appointment duration by staff member to improve efficiency. By load balancing student arrival throughout the day, QLess maximizes staff utilization and saves colleges the need to constantly staff to peak time levels.

Colleges can provide services to more students per day with QLess. QLess Flex Appointments fills even small holes in the schedule, so if an appointment ends 10 minutes early, the system calls the next person. Staff members never sit idle waiting for the next appointment.

In addition, QLess helps reduce no-shows up to 60 percent. The system lets students indicate that they can't make it by texting a single letter response, and they do so because it's easy. One college said that 94 percent of students with an hour or longer queue time waiting remotely with QLess showed up for their appointment. The system keeps students informed with status updates so they're ready to go when it's their turn.

With QLess, staff members don't need to be line monitors. They can focus on the student appointment without feeling the stress of a line of students out the door. Staff members have shared that their interactions are more pleasant because the students haven't been forced to waste time standing in line.

Best of all, because it can accurately forecast service times, the QLess system can shut down the queue toward the end of the day so that staff can go home on time instead of staying late every day. This makes for happier, more productive staff members.

> *"My boss is used to hearing 'we're understaffed' from his departments. I'm the only one who can say, 'We served 732 students last week."*
>
> **VP for Enrollment Management, The University of Texas at Dallas**

4. Inside Higher Ed, "Cut Student Services? Think Again," Ben Eisen, July 29, 2009.
   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/07/29/gradrate

Transform Your Campus with QLess

Anna joined the QLess Mobile Queue for Student Services on her phone and indicated that she had a financial aid issue. The system let her know that she had 45 mins until her turn. She used that time to go to her professor's office hours and got her questions answered about the assignment. While meeting with the professor, she received a text that her Student Services appointment would be in 15 minutes. By texting a single letter, she asked for the appointment to be a little later so she could finish her meeting. QLess made that happen while keeping her place in line. When she got to the front of the virtual queue, she had a productive meeting with a Financial Aid staffer who had the time and expertise to solve her problem. She left Student Services with time to spare and arrived to her job on time. She received a text message with a brief satisfaction survey about her appointment and took the time to reply – 5 stars!

» Respect student's time: Don't add to their stress. Eliminate standing in line with QLess interactive mobile queuing.

» Give students an opportunity to be heard: Ask them about their experience with QLess SMS surveys, which students respond to. Listen to their feedback to make procedural enhancements and increase satisfaction.

» Improve resource scheduling based on data on how students use services: Match staff skillsets to student needs for more efficient use of limited resources.

» Manage overtime and increase staff morale by managing when queues end.

» Collect detailed metrics on how services are used to justify funding.

» Increase staff efficiency. QLess Flex Appointments keep you informed about whether the next student in line is coming in or needs to cancel and auto-fills any gaps in the schedule to eliminate staff down time from missed appointments.

The Gainful Employment Rule

In the United States, the Gainful Employment rule requires higher education institutions to report on whether certain programs lead to gainful employment, based on a measure of the debt-to-income rates of their recent graduates. Programs that do not meet minimum requirements may lose federal aid.

Although the specifics of the rule and its enforcement are in flux, schools should continue to find ways to promote the financial success of their students. There are many steps colleges can take, including identifying at-risk students, improving loan counseling efforts, teaching financial literacy, and improving student retention.

QLess solutions can help with student satisfaction and student retention, especially with the population most at risk of dropping out – and most at risk of defaulting on loans. In addition, the analytics provided by QLess can help document which services students use and how frequently. This data can be correlated with retention, graduation, and gainful employment to precisely quantify the value of these services to students, which can be used to obtain additional funding to increase services for at-risk students.

In addition, QLess allows graduating students to opt-in to receive ongoing communications from the school. QLess can provide quick SMS surveys (with better response rates than other methods) to these graduates to better understand their employment situation, status of loan payments, and other relevant information.

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