

# HOW COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES ORGANIZE THEMSELVES TO PROMOTE STUDENT PERSISTENCE:

## THE EMERGING NATIONAL PICTURE

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# Grappling With Questions

The limits of current theories and research on student persistence provide the backdrop.

- How and to what extent do institutions organize themselves to promote student persistence?
- What policies and practices do institutions enact to try to enhance student persistence?



# Focal Points of Our Inquiry: Actionable Implications

- Understanding the role of campus policies and practices
- Identifying actionable practices and policies
- Providing useful benchmarks of normative and effective policies and practices



# Utility of Benchmarking



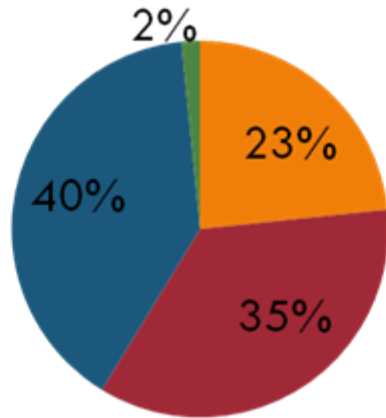
- The empirical base for understanding how practices and policies affect student persistence is still developing.
- In the meantime, comparative data are an important resource for institutions
  - ▣ Recommendations from institutional policy-makers

# Survey of Institutional Retention Practices

2009:  
Survey of  
4-year  
institutions  
nation wide

- Web-based administration
  - ▣ 1484 institutions surveyed
  - ▣ Response rate of 30% (ca. 442 responding institutions)
- Findings focus on:
  - ▣ Coordination of Retention Efforts
  - ▣ Actionable Institutional Policies/Practices
    - Orientation
    - Academic Advising
    - Early Warning
    - Faculty-Student Interaction
    - Research and Assessment

# Institutional Characteristics



■ Research ■ Masters ■ Baccalaureate ■ Other

## □ Mean SAT (Critical Reading & Math) scores:

- 978 (25th percentile)
- 1196 (75th percentile)

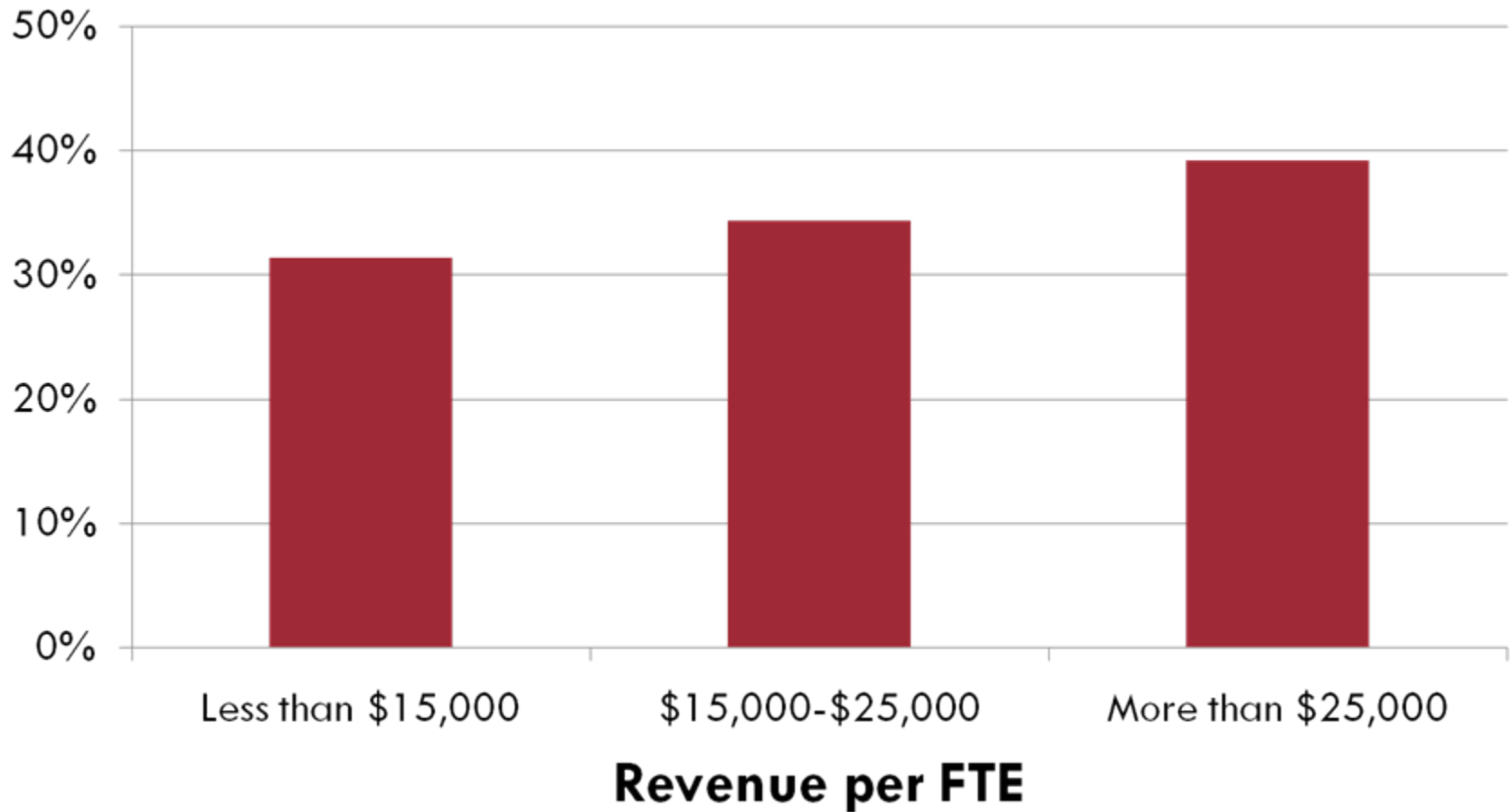
- Mean scores on select variables
  - Fall-to-fall retention rate for first time 1<sup>st</sup> year students 75.73% (national mean =72.65%)
  - 40% of the institutions have a requirement for full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking students to live on campus
- Median revenue figures
  - Instructional expenses per FTE \$5,802
  - Tuition and fee revenues \$4,846/per FTE
  - Total revenue \$49,588,399

# Coordination of Retention Efforts: Structures in Place

- 74 % reported having a retention coordinator
  - Based on two definitions
    - “an administrator charged with coordinating efforts”
    - “an administrator acting as a central resource”
    - Most reported that the position entails both functions
  - Mean FTE reported for the position was .35
  - 66% reported retention coordinator has at least some **authority to implement** new initiatives
  - 32% reported retention coordinator has at least some **authority to fund** new initiatives
  
- 63% have a retention committee
  
- 27% report coordinating retention program to a great extent

# Percentage FTE Devoted to Retention Coordination at Institutions with Retention Coordinators

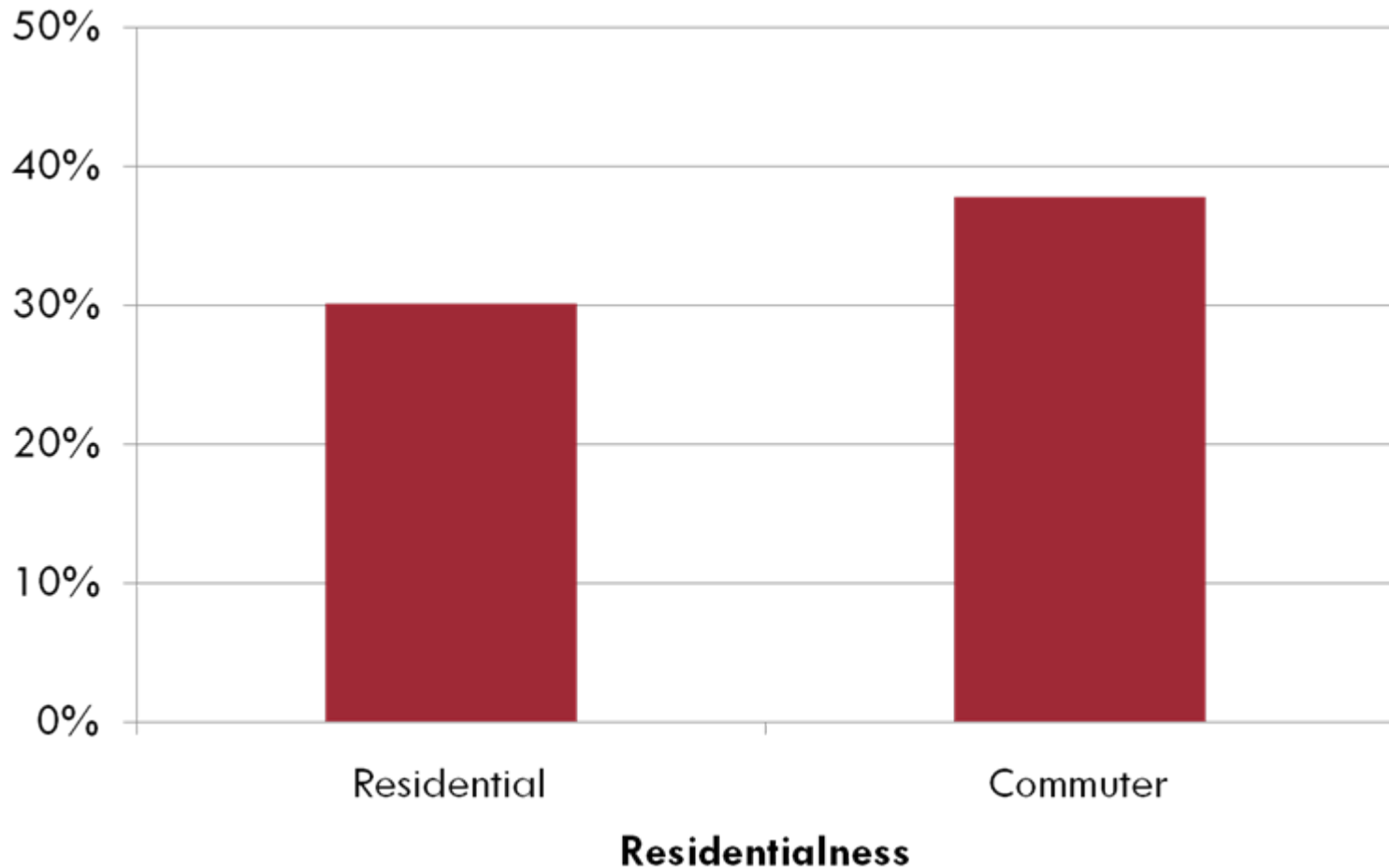
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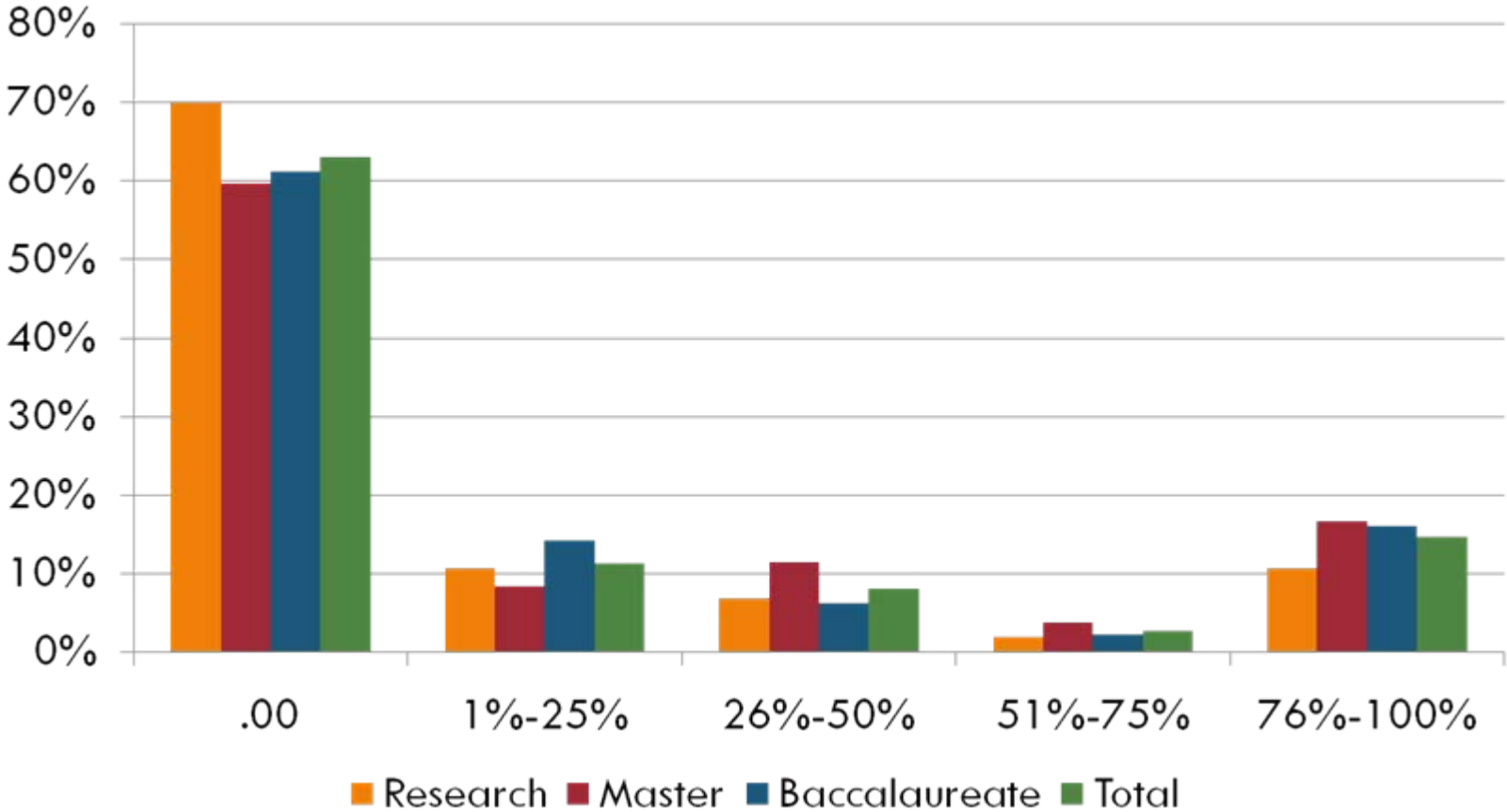


# Percentage FTE Devoted to Retention Coordination at Institutions with Retention Coordinators (continued)

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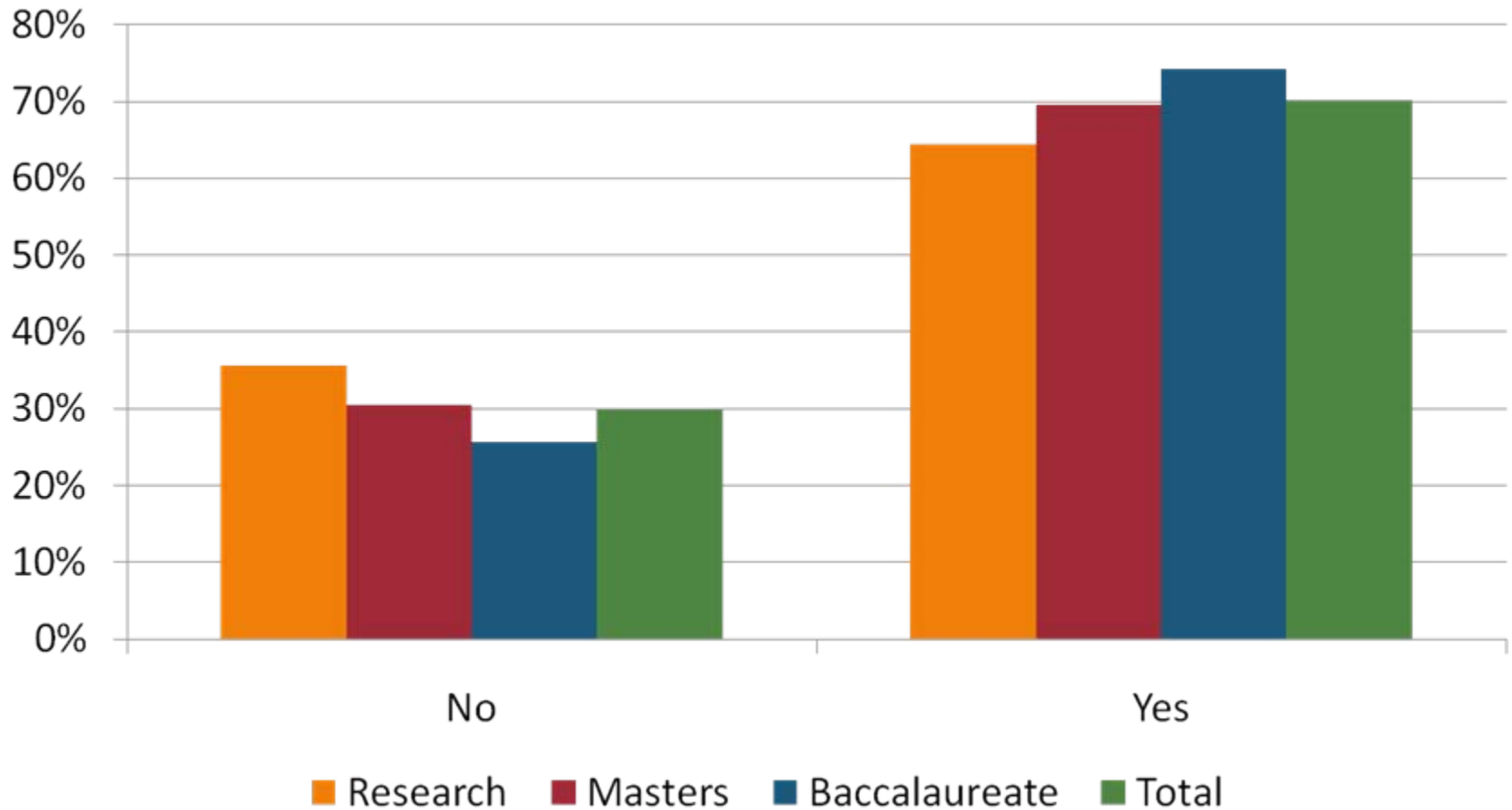
# Percentage of an FTE Devoted to the “Retention Coordinator” Role



# Orientation

- 76% report that more than three quarters of first-year students participated in entire orientation program.
  - 90% report that more than half participated in entire orientation program.
- Orientation program entails a mean of 3.94 days for entering first-year students.
- 44% report having an orientation program that extends through the first semester of classes.

# Percentage of Schools that Collected Midterm Grade Information for First-Year Students in 2007-2008



# Policies for Early Warning

- 70% report they collect **mid-term grade** information for first-year students
- 68% report they ask faculty to complete **Early Alert** forms for first-year students
- 53% report they regularly flag specific courses with high percentages of **Ds, Fs, or Withdrawals**
- 46% report they offer voluntary weekly sessions to deepen student learning in courses with traditionally high D, F, & W rates.

# Policies for Faculty Interaction

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- 69% report that more than half of 100-level classes were taught by full-time faculty
- 66% report average class size for courses primarily taken by 1<sup>st</sup> year students is between **1-30 students**

*However...*

- 78% report that incentives for full-time faculty to teach first-year classes were **non-existent or small**

# Academic Advising

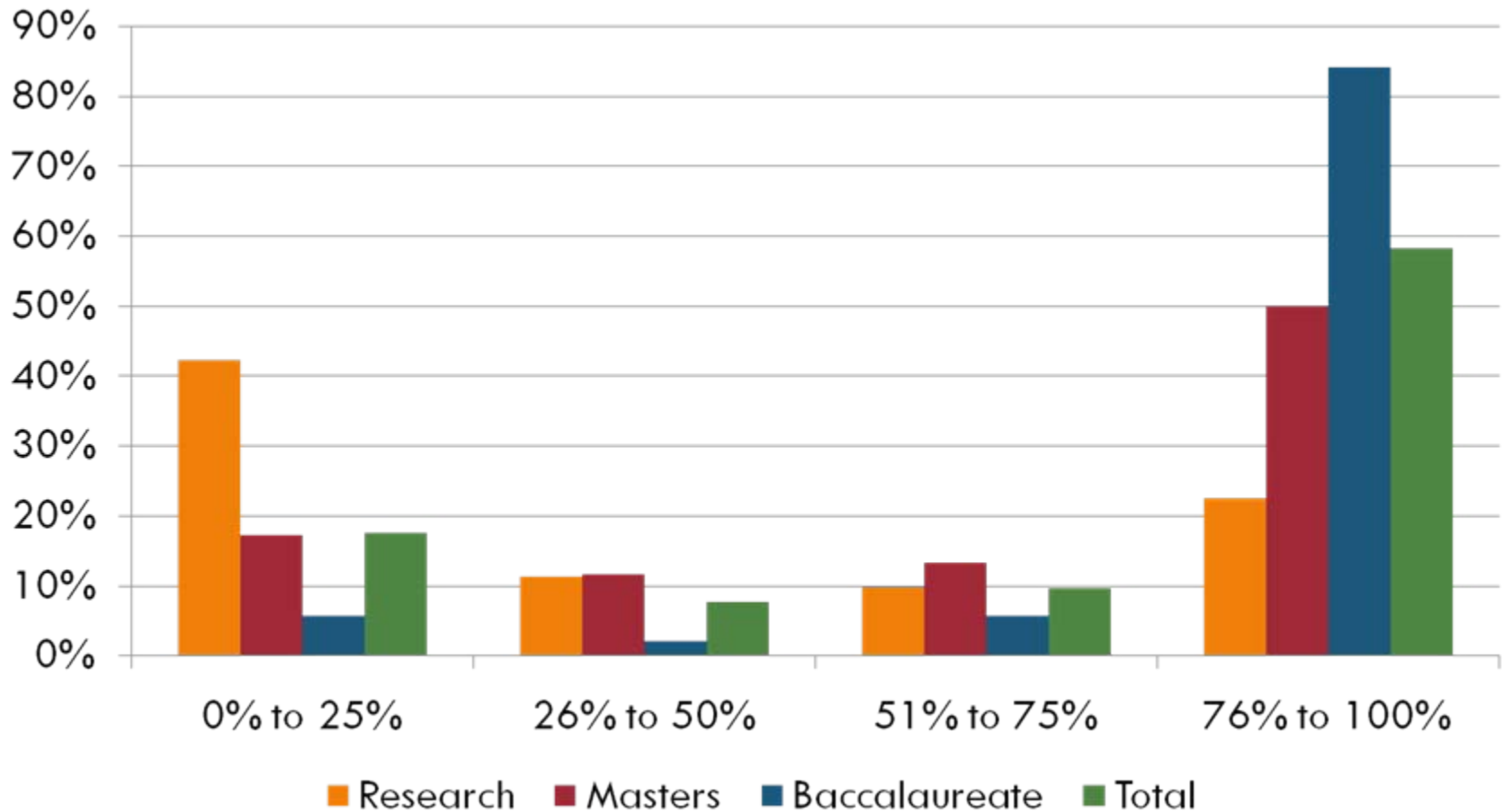
## Advising Practices

- 83% require first-year students to meet with an academic advisor at least once per term
- 93% report that full-time faculty act as academic advisors to undergraduates

## Advising Roles

- 58% estimate that more than three-quarters of their first-year students were **advised by full-time faculty**
- 34% estimate that more than three-quarters of first-year students were **advised by professional advisors**

# Proportion of 1<sup>st</sup> Year Students Advised by Full-Time Faculty in the 2007-2008





# Implications

- Institutions are, in fact, organizing for retention.

However,...

- Resources (e.g. FTE, funding and programming authority) devoted to the enterprise may not be equal to the task.
  - Differences in structures across institutional type:
    - Research institutions rely on professional advisors more than faculty for advising first-year students
    - Research institutions show a lower FTE for retention coordinator positions, and emphasize committee efforts vs stronger coordination

# Concluding Remarks

- Results may reflect the early stages of coordination and/or of institutional recognition that organization is needed.
- Federal and State agencies are increasingly focused on outcomes, so the organizing trend is likely to continue.
- Economic factors causing families to consider "value" may also contribute to the continuance of the trend.
- The need for longitudinal research
  - ▣ To determine if these patterns hold over time
  - ▣ To tie the retention factors noted in the study to actual retention results



# Discussion, Questions

- What do these patterns suggest about the genuine commitment of colleges and universities to encourage student persistence and graduation?

# Contact Us

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# Reports

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- Survey 2006

- Pilot Report available at [www.collegeboard.com/retention](http://www.collegeboard.com/retention)

- Survey 2009

- Report coming in Winter 2010