# Frequently Asked Questions
# Retention

February 2025

## 1. What is the difference between retention and attrition? Which do we report?

Retention is the number of students who complete the course or program of study. Attrition is the remaining number of students who do not complete the course for any reason. This metric is reported as retention.

## 2. Why is retention important?

Retention signifies how well an institution is supporting students to stay enrolled and eventually graduate.

## 3. Students leave for personal reasons; why do we have to count them as attrition?

It is important that all reasons for attrition are tracked and that strategies are developed to assist students in completing their chosen course of study. Both institutional and programmatic accreditors require that all reasons for attrition are counted.

## 4. What are non-academic reasons that students leave the program?

This list is not all-inclusive, common situations include student financial considerations; lack of academic preparation to successfully complete the course; lack of field experience; unforeseen medical or family issues; and leaving for another job or professional opportunity.

## 5. What is the benchmark for retention?

70%

## 6. How do I calculate the retention rate?

Retention is based upon the number of students continuing in the program *after* completing 10% of the program's advertised **total** clock hours. This includes all **core** AEMT or paramedic coursework (not inclusive of prerequisites such as English, anatomy and physiology, EMT, etc.). Core AEMT or paramedic coursework encompasses all phases of the program including didactic, lab, clinical, field experience, and capstone field internship.

## 7. How was the 70% threshold determined?

70% is the common metric that most institutional and programmatic accreditors use as the reasonable benchmark for retention.

## 8. Who sets or requires that programs are accountable for student retention?

The CAAHEP *Standards* require programs to periodically assess their effectiveness in achieving several outcomes including programmatic retention. CoAEMSP is responsible for establishing the outcomes thresholds.

## 9. Our cohorts are small so loss of only a few students drops our retention rate below 70%.  Can we get an exception?

There is no exception for smaller cohort sizes; the situation can be discussed in a dialogue with CoAEMSP if the program continues to fall below the 70% threshold for three consecutive years.

## 10. What happens if our program does not meet the 70% benchmark?

Accredited programs that fail to meet any single outcome threshold for each year of three (3) consecutive years may be recommended for Probationary Accreditation. LoR programs that fail to meet any single outcome threshold for each year of three (3) consecutive years may have their LoR revoked.

## 11. What is the average retention rate for all paramedic programs?

The retention rate for all reporting paramedic programs averages 80%.

## 12. Our program has an open enrollment policy, so how can we help control attrition?

Explore the possibility of adding pre-requisites or screening and testing for your program. Screening tools are common in many colleges, especially in allied health career fields.

## 13. Should we be tracking the reasons why students leave the program?

Yes.  You will report these numbers on the Annual Report.  At a minimum track:

- Academic
    - Number dismissed due to grades
    - Number withdrew due to grades
    - Number dismissed due to other academic reasons
- Non-academic reasons:
    - Number due to financial reasons
    - Number due to medical/personal reasons
    - Number due to other/unknown reasons

## 14. What are some suggestions and best practices to retain students?

a. If your program is required to maintain open enrollment, explore with your administration if it is possible to add pre-requisites or screening and testing for your specialized program. Some colleges are not able to permit additional requirements based on statutes or rules, but screening tools are common in many colleges, especially in allied health career fields.

b. Conduct interviews with applicants. Detail the requirements, schedules, rigor, cost, and other specifics to allow the student an informed choice regarding admission. Discuss balancing course work, work schedules, and family obligations.

c. Provide a thorough orientation for a new cohort with all the information discussed in the interview. Orientation sessions can be especially effective prior to the course start date and before finalizing enrollment. Establish appropriate expectations.

d. Invite/include student family members to the orientation session and explain the program requirements and how they can support their loved ones.

e. Provide strategies for success that include information on developing study skills, test taking tips, creating a study environment, time management, and other tips for success.

f. Faculty should meet with enrolled students at specified points in the program to review academic status, clinical and field progress toward requirements, areas where the student may be struggling and potential remediation/resources.

g. Structure the classroom and lab sessions to engage and challenge students that lead to development of critical thinking skills.

h. Suggest that students form study groups that can provide mutual encouragement and enhance learning.

i. Conduct exit interviews with students who drop/withdraw from the program. You may think you know why they are leaving but there may be other reasons.

j. Facilitate outside tutoring/resources through faculty, adjunct instructors, or other sources.

k. Identify and refer at-risk students.

l. For programs offered over multiple semesters, it can be easy for a student to just not return. Keep track of the cohort and make follow-up contact with any non-returning student.

m. If your program administration wants all applicants accepted/enrolled for financial reasons, have a crucial conversation with them about the goals and aims of an EMS career and the EMS educational program.

n. Connect with the college student services as soon as problems such as learning disabilities are discovered.

o. Provide advising for students regarding personal issues during the program.

p. Recommend potential applicants complete math, English, and other general education courses to prepare for the rigors of the program, especially if they have been out of the academic environment for some time.

q. Provide frequent evaluation of performance in all domains during the program.

r. Create a culture that provides support and caring for student success.