HOW COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES ORGANIZE THEMSELVES TO PROMOTE STUDENT PERSISTENCE:

THE EMERGING NATIONAL PICTURE

Don Hossler
Indiana University

Jerome A. Lucido
University of Southern California

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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

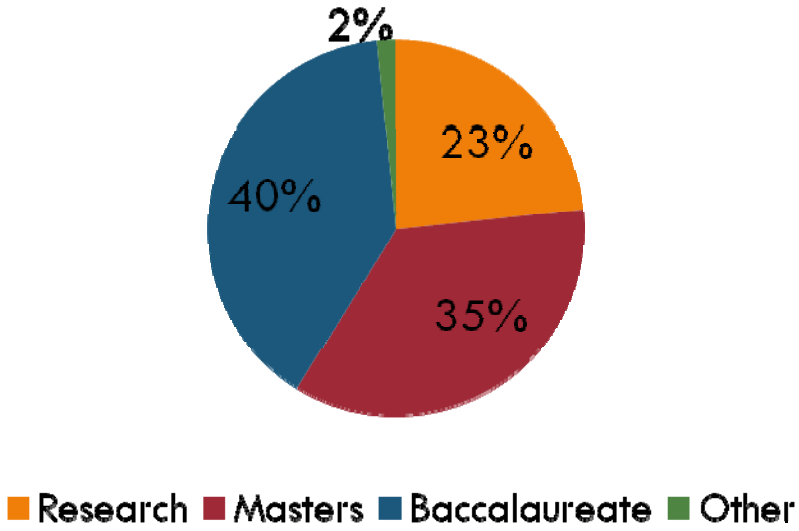
- The empirical base for understanding how practices and policies affect student persistence is still developing.
- In the meantime, comparative data are an important resource for institutions
  - Recommendations from institutional policy-makers

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



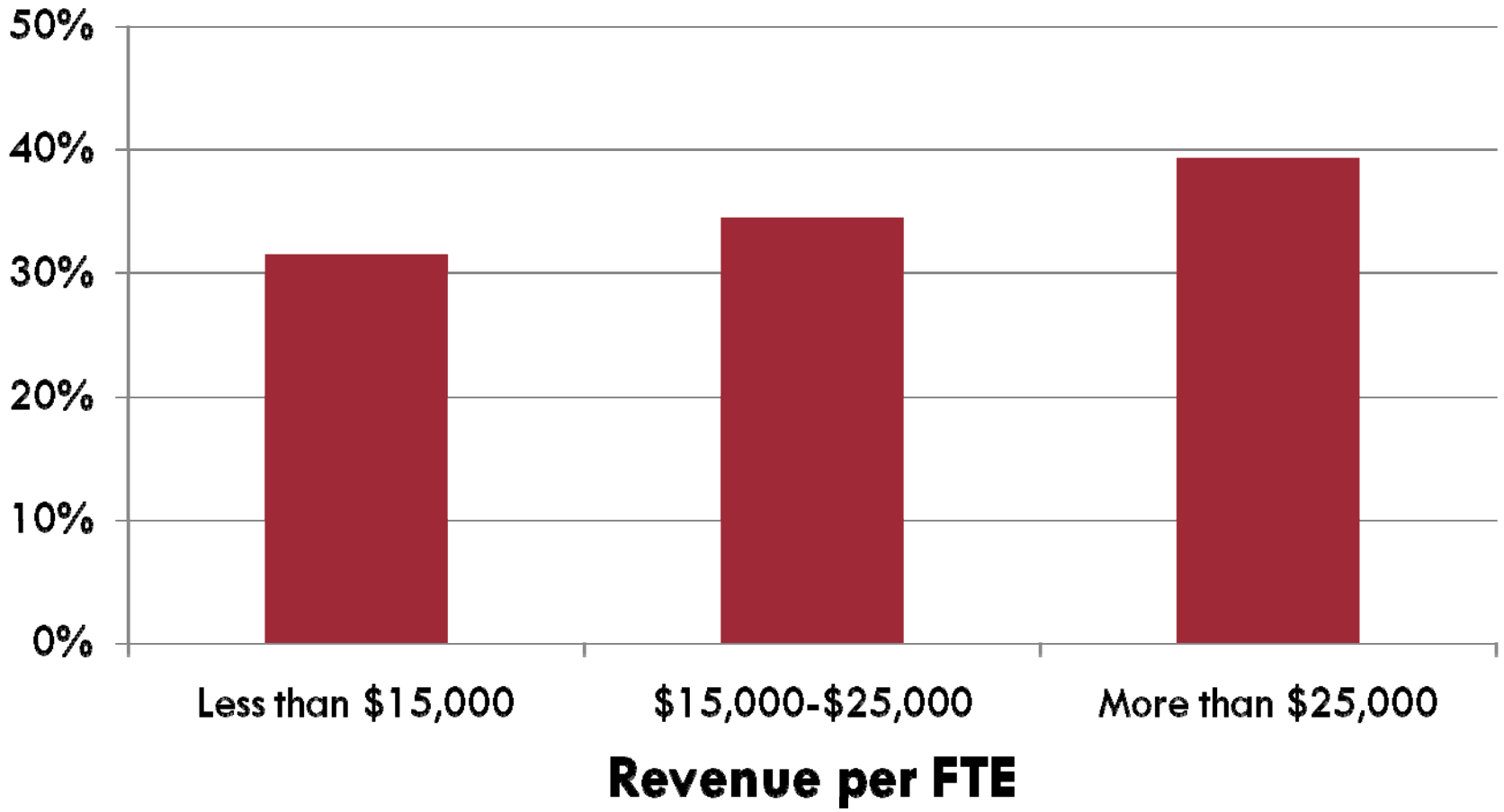
- Mean SAT (Critical Reading & Math) scores:
  - 978 (25th percentile)
  - 1196 (75th percentile)

- Mean scores on select variables
  - Fall-to-fall retention rate for first time 1st 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

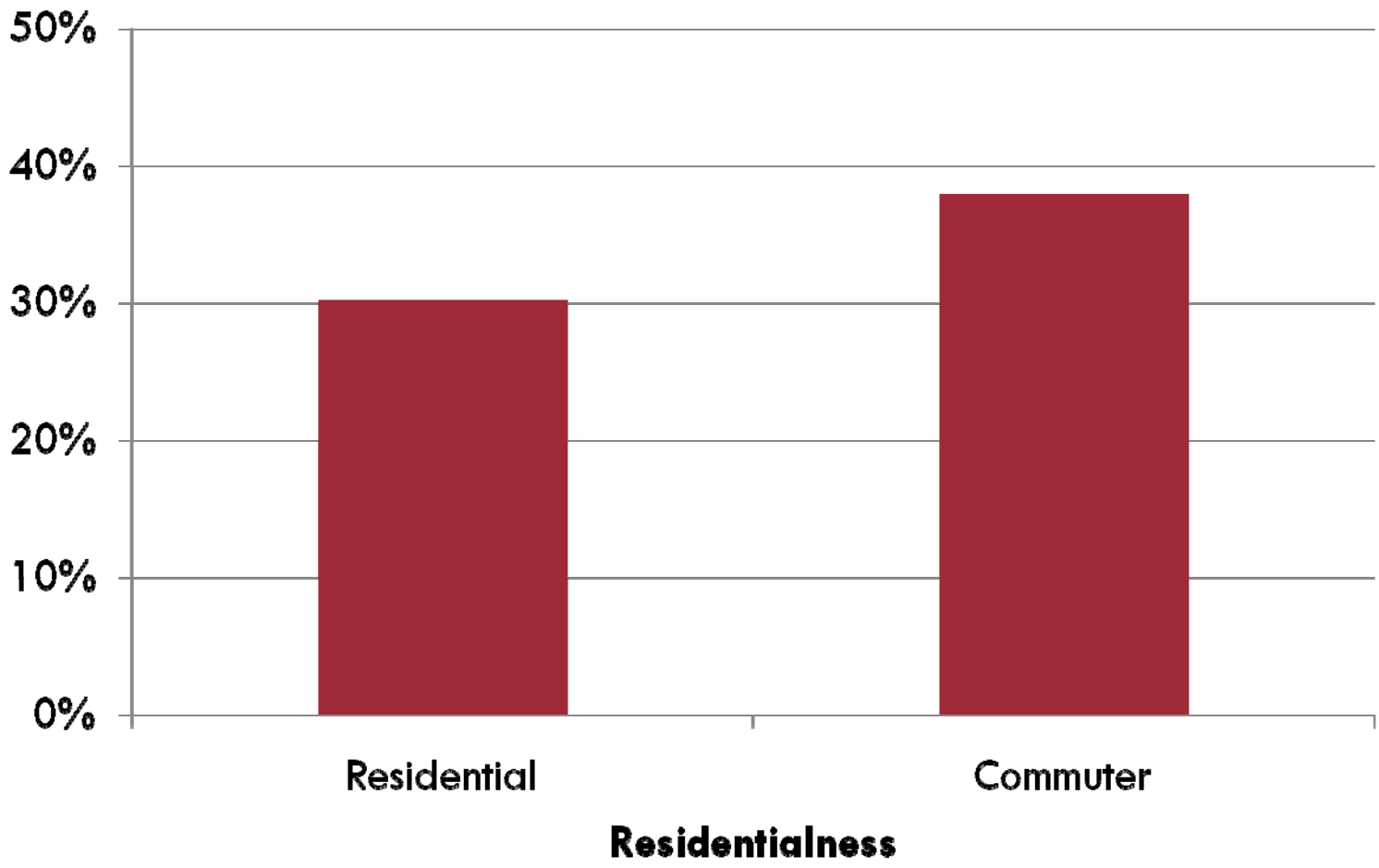
Coordination of Retention Efforts: Structures in Place

- 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

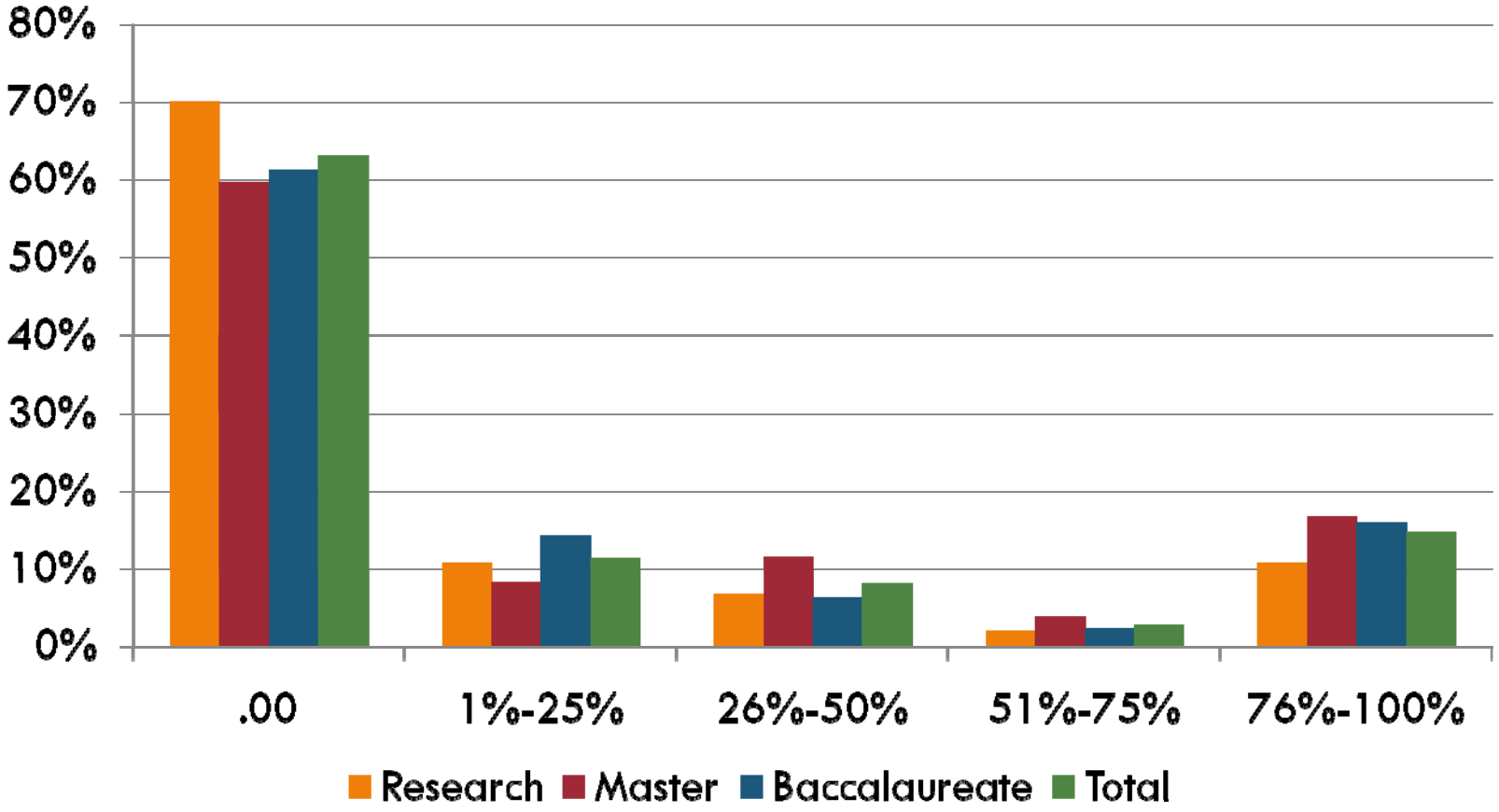
Percentage FTE Devoted to Retention Coordination at Institutions with Retention Coordinators



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



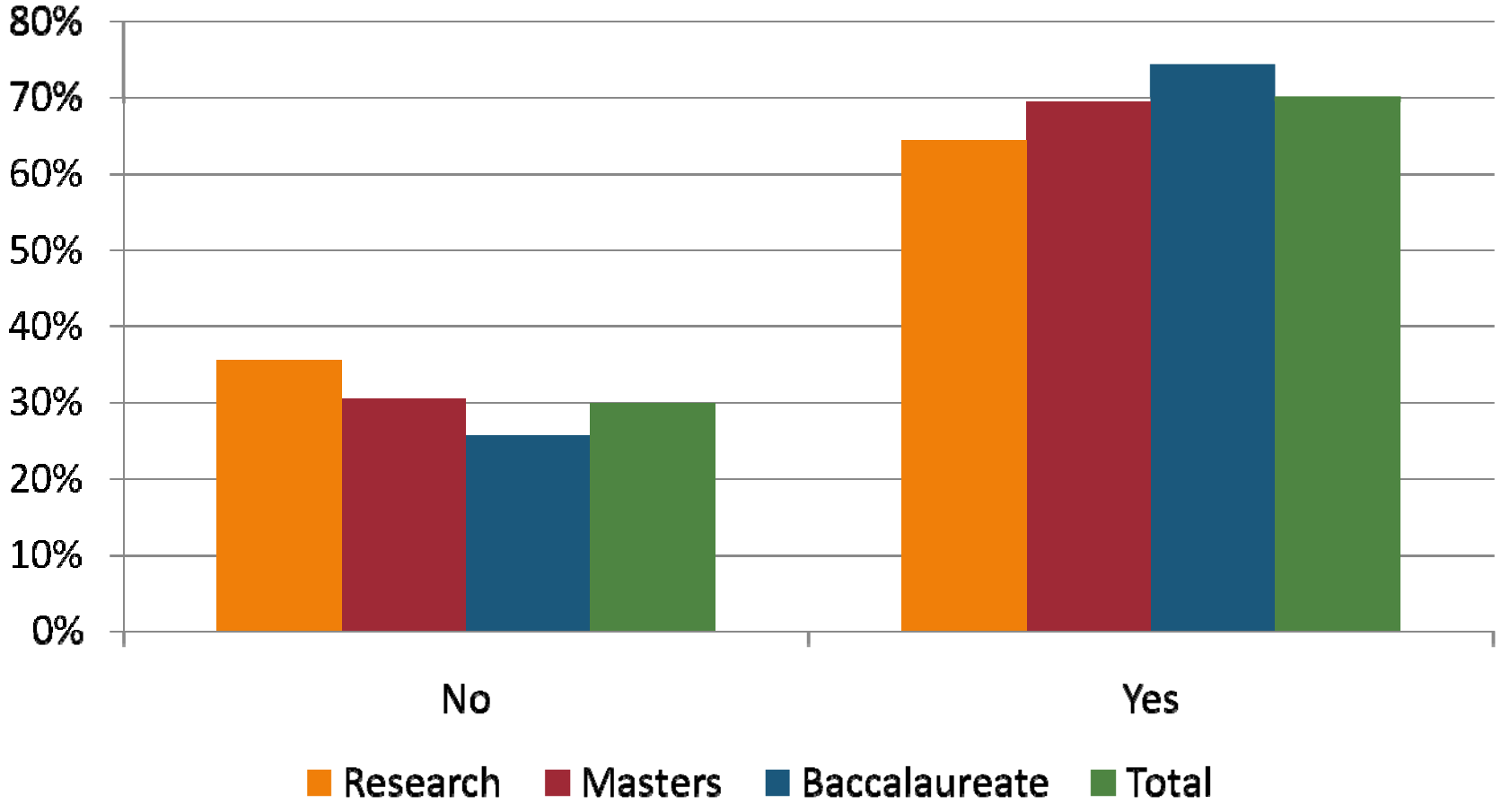
Percentage of an FTE Devoted to the "Retention Coordinator" Role



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

- 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 1st 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

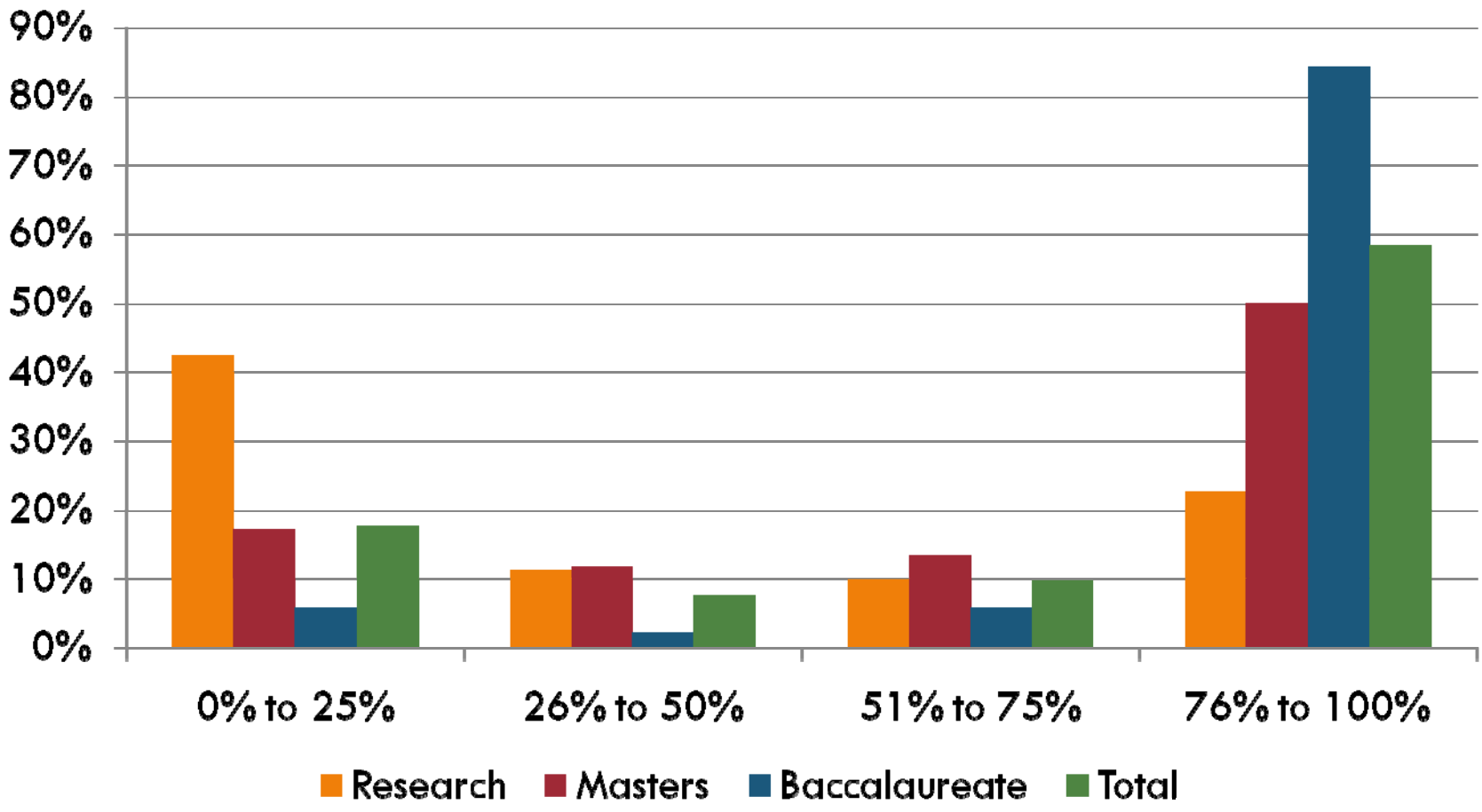
Advising Practices

- 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 under-graduates

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 1st 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

Indiana University

Project on Academic Success

http://pas.indiana.edu

Presentation available via download:

http://pas.indiana.edu/cb/resources.cfm

hossler@indiana.edu

jlucido@usc.edu

Reports

- Survey 2006
  - Pilot Report available at www.collegeboard.com/retention
- Survey 2009
  - Report coming in Winter 2010