Ten Factors of Retention in Online Courses

Shanley (2009, 2011) reviewed retention studies to identify common factors associated with student retention in asynchronous online courses.

1. **Support services** (advising, tutors, libraries, technical support).
2. **Early submission of work with instructor feedback and frequent contact** (fast response to students’ questions, timely communication, prompt feedback).
3. **Clearly stated student expectations BEFORE and THROUGHOUT course** (once is not enough — full and accurate information of what is required in the course; participation expectations on assignments, assessments, activities; redundant communication even if stated in syllabus).
4. **Student orientation sessions** (address feelings of isolation, tips in time management, test taking, study skills, technical support with early chance to try out technology; logical navigation; can be done asynchronously or f2f).
5. **Relevancy and accuracy of course content and design** (inspiring, accurate, logically coherent, simple navigation, relevant to students, unbroken links, avoid high cognitive load).
6. **Faculty preparedness** (well-formatted images, readings, discussion questions, self-tests, NOT just lecture notes, links; timely response to discussions, email, virtual office).
7. **Student locus of control** (students feel they have impact on how course is conducted; direct ownership of participation; confidence; midcourse or earlier formative evaluations).
8. **Age of students** (older students do better juggling careers and family; give opportunities for older students to share experiences in discussions and group work).
9. **Student participation** (greater frequency and amount of time; student engagement; work in blocks of time; requirements for students to interact with each other).
10. **Social integration into cohort and peer-to-peer support** (social networking, connecting academic to social life, defined roles in online learning community, cultivation of student relationships with each other).
11. **Additional:** prior experience with online learning, GPA, career and family responsibilities; online learners have strong independent learning style that can lead to higher dropout rates and thus, not a reflection on course design.

References
