

Enrollment Management: RETENTION REPORT to Faculty Senate, December 2005

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Introduction

Enrollment Management has been able to promote student success through raising expectations and standards of excellence throughout our units, building partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs, transforming existing practices, and creating innovative programs to foster student growth and engagement. As a result of our efforts, we are thrilled that Utah State University has been recognized throughout the state of Utah and nationally for its commitment to improving student success and persistence.

Awards

2005 Lee-Noel and Randi Levitz Retention Excellence Winner for *Transformational U: A Systematic Institution Wide Approach to Student Success and Retention*

<http://www.noellevitz.com/Papers+and+Research/Retention+Excellence+Awards/Utah+State+University>

This award recognizes the most successful and state-of-the-art programs, and was established in 1989 to honor retention achievements of institutions of higher education in North America.

2005 National Association of Students Personnel Administrators Utah Outstanding Faculty Award

Joyce Kinkead, Utah State University Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and Research and Professor of English, was nominated by her colleagues and recognized for her service and commitment to student success. NASPA presents five awards each year to leaders in higher education in Utah. One of these prestigious awards is the Outstanding Faculty Award.

<http://www.usu.edu/ust/?ArticleID=5283>

Presentations

Retention and Time to Graduation: A State and Institutional Imperative, April 2005 Board of Regents Presentation at Dixie State College.

Transforming an Institution via Enrollment Management, July 2005 National Conference on Student Retention, Recruitment, and Marketing in Washington, D.C. and October 2005 The National Symposium on Student Retention in Dallas, Texas.

Intentional Proactive Advising for Student Success, September 2005 Utah NASPA Conference at the University of Utah.

Publications

"Whole-Campus Efforts Boosts Persistence Rates", *Recruitment and Retention in Higher Education*, October 2005, Vol. 19, No. 10.

"Utah State Builds Relationships to Retain Top Students, Improve Retention", *Strategies*, Fall 2004.

Cohort Reporting and Tracking

Fall 2003 First-time, Full-Time, Main Campus Cohort 2358 total students

987 students did not return Fall 2004

First year retention rate 73.4%

In 2003, the institution added a matriculation advisor, Krystin Deschamps, to its staff, who closely tracks those students who leave campus; a leave-of-absence policy was created that makes it easier for them to return. Cultural factors – such as the tendency of USU students to marry earlier and to go on church service missions – lead many of them to take a break from their education. Deschamps, who is located in the Registrar's Office, has been instrumental in advising students as to their exit options and the ramifications that their decisions may have on time-to-degree. She has also strived to get the word out regarding the exit procedure, in addition to recruiting these students back.

As a result of the matriculation advisor position and the leave of absence policy, we have been able to track our missionary students. In the Fall 2003 First-time, Full-Time, Main Campus Cohort, 348 students were on a leave of absence for church or military service and planned to return to USU in the spring, summer, or fall of 2005.

As of fall 2005 232 students are enrolled 67%
27 plan to enroll in spring 2006, 1 summer 2006, and 9 Fall 2006, 1 spring 2007
Overall return rate 78%

Of the 52 students who chose not to return 36 transferred to surrounding institutions

BSU	1	ISU	3
BYU	14	SLCC	1
BYU HI	1	Weber	2
BYU ID	4	Utah	8
		UVSC	2

The remaining 16 withdrew for other reasons, only 3 mentioned marriage

Fall 2004 First-time, Full-Time, Main Campus Cohort 2027 total students

830 students did not return Fall 2005

478 students have withdrawn or are on Leave of Absence

375 estimated cohort exclusions

(**The Banner Conversion has seriously hindered our efforts in reporting clean data. This is our best estimation at this time.)

352 students who have left and we do not know why

73 of the students had UBUS and Undeclared as their major code—20% of leaver group

131 had a USU GPA of a 2.3 or below—40% of the leaver group was not in good standing or deemed at risk by their USU GPA

16 of these students were admitted with qualifications lower than our admission standards

Initiatives Updates

Identification of Leavers

After a comprehensive review of cohort, enrollment, withdrawal and leave of absence reports, the Retention Specialist has been more intentional in working with the Vice Provost, Associate Deans, Matriculation Advisor, Honors and the University Advising Center in identifying possible leavers and reasons for exiting, in addition to high-touch follow-up in an effort to retain more students. Furthermore, a survey to identify at-risk leavers was created and sent to all undeclared students with a USU GPA of a 2.3 or lower, along with a note encouraging them to meet with their advisor prior to priority registration for Fall 2005.

E-mail Reminder

After Priority Registration each semester, first-time full-time cohort students not registered receive an e-mail reminding them to register for the next term, or file the appropriate exit paperwork. They are directed to the "USU Cares" web page www.usu.edu/usucares.

Exit Interviews

All non-returning students after day 15 each semester receive an e-mail asking why they have left and offering support for their return. All students with 3.5 USU GPA or higher are contacted by phone to inquire about their plans. In addition, a random sample phone survey of the remaining non-returning students is conducted.

Focus Groups

The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and Research conducts focus groups with both first year and transfer students to garner information about their experience and how to improve our efforts. The fall semester groups focus on honors-level students. (The student feedback has brought about changes that vary from registration practices to safe lighting on campus.)

Retention Scholarship

With retention identified as a key goal for the institution, a Board of Trustees member endowed a new scholarship to enable students to continue their university education. Students applying for the scholarship submit a letter that addresses educational and career goals and a semester-by-semester plan for completing their degree with a graduation date.

Matriculation Advisor

The Matriculation Advisor position has played an instrumental role in assisting the Retention Specialist in advising students about their exit options, tracking and following up on leavers, and recruiting back students

who are placed on leave. The duties of this position continually evolve and are refined as we determine new ways to promote student success.

* The Outreach campaign **THINK Ahead** was developed to make all students aware of their exit options and procedures if they decide to take away from their academic program.

*The Leave of Absence questions and answers information page and forms have been redesigned.
<http://www.usu.edu/registrar/absence/q-a-process.cfm>

* *The Missionary Guide* has been developed to assist our 350+ church service missionaries that take a leave from their academic program. <http://www.usu.edu/registrar/absence/q-a-process.cfm>

*USU e-mails accounts of students who are on leave are now protected and open while they are away from USU so that they may still be connected to the University. Additionally, they receive important information about returning upon completion of their leave.

*A communication flow to recruit back students on leave of absence has been developed and includes a feedback loop with the Retention Specialist, Director of Honors and the Vice Provost. Each student receives an e-mail and a letter to their permanent addresses, welcoming them back and encourages the student to be in touch with their advisor, financial aid and housing offices. Over the coming year, it is our hope that the Council of Associate Deans will discuss the roles of each college in recruiting back their students, and how to ensure the successful academic transition of these students.

General Catalog

A serious revision of the Catalog as recommended by the Catalog Coordinating Committee resulted in the insertion of four-year plans planning worksheets as well as a good many four-year plans for specific degree programs. This revision, in addition to the Course Clusters initiative that specified class schedules for the first semester of particular degree programs, alerts new students to the importance of planning their undergraduate careers. Honors 2000, which enrolls 300+ new freshmen, requires a four-year plan as one of its assignments. This has been so helpful to students that the assignment will be extended to the enrollment of Connections, which captures about 75% of new students.

Possible Future Initiatives

*Work with the Council of Associate Deans to create an Academic Checklist, organized by college, for returning missionaries--helpful hints to assist the transition back in addition to encouraging advisors to meet with all prospective missionaries prior to their departure and create an academic degree plan.

*Post appropriate leave of absence and exit information on the new Parents information webpage. (See www.usu.edu/parents.)

Intrusive Advising

A presentation was created and presented at the Annual USU Advising Conference on Intentional and Proactive Advising for student Success by colleagues in academic and student affairs. The purpose of this session was to increase awareness about best practices, encourage consistency in methods and communication and to foster collaborative partnerships. The following are some of the highlights about what USU is doing to enhance student persistence.

****Undeclared Students***

Registration holds for all students to ensure advising
Students with 30+ Credits with 2.0-2.49 GPA are required to meet with an academic advisor to determine obstacles and establish expectations
Students with 60+ Credits holds required to meet with an academic advisor to complete an institutional agreement
Future Plans: Action plans and packets; Sophomore Day.

****Special Education Students***

SOAR: Review next steps
Appointments: E-mail reminder, match program in major to student goals, review requirements, and create and advising file.
Four Year Plans: Together the student and the advisor map out a plan for the student's academic career.

The student actively seeks courses and opportunities to enhance their academic and career goals.

***Multicultural Students**

Building confidence and knowledge: Orientation and first year programs, developing accountability and leadership the student's active participation.

Membership to leadership philosophy.

Raising the bar and increasing expectations. N.B. The academic preparedness of our students of color has risen significantly over the past 5 years as evidenced by their Admissions Index.

Application to traditional advising: Establish a goal, develop a flow of progressive student steps, and think creatively.

***Agriculture Systems Technology**

Being an advocate.

Objective third party.

Open door policy.

Information and Resources, "*Pointing out the Possibilities*": Give the student choices and encourage them to explore; they need to be responsible and make the best choice for them.

Be positive, listen, smile, encourage, and provide options.

***Students with Academic Difficulties**

Insure "*Academic Alert*" comes early enough in the semester to be useful; the earlier we address the problem, the less likely it will manifest itself in withdrawal.

Refer to **THINK Success** Website www.usu.edu/registrar/thinksuccess

Re-Admit Students: Interview to determine educational goals and commitment, contract (courses outlined with Advisors input, # of credits needed and GPA to be achieved to continue) and time management grid—candid discussion about what it will take to succeed—realistic expectations.

Warning and Probation

In cooperation with the Provost Office, the Council of Associate Deans reviewed the Warning and Probation practices conducted in each college and centrally. This review resulted in common practices regarding notification, language in letters regarding definitions, meeting with advisors and registration holds.

Additionally, it was agreed that the Provost Office will send an e-mail to these at-risk students in order to ensure they are receiving ample notification and to stress the seriousness of their situation. Furthermore, an Academic Success website was developed in order to assist students and advisors in identifying and changing behaviors that can lead to academic dismissal. www.usu.edu/registrar/thinksuccess

Utah System of Higher Education Retention and Persistence to Graduation

Action Plan

Utah State University is the lead author for the Utah System in addressing retention and time to graduation initiatives. The following action items have been identified and presented in October of 2005. The Chief Academic Officers at USU will continue to work as an advocate for system leadership in retention and graduation issues.

*Each institution should establish retention and time to graduation/completion goals appropriate to its peers and its institutional type.

*Each institution in the system should join the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) located at the University of Oklahoma, which offers rich data analysis and resources. (Source: www.ou.edu/csrde) The system should also receive the institutional reports.

*The system will organize a Best Practices session to address key issues. The regular sharing of issues, roadblocks, and practices provide a feedback loop that can improve all institutions. N.B. CSRDE is interested in regional meetings and might provide the expertise for a statewide initiative.

*The National Clearing House should be activated to track completers throughout the system so that the State begins to establish alternative data points that lend evidence to Alexander Astin's assertion that students are completers—just at another institution.

*Consider a revision in the Utah Council agenda in which recruiting takes place at the junior year rather than the senior year. Institutional differentiation and "fit" between student and institution should be emphasized. Likewise, financial aid should be illuminated.

*Use the ACT at the junior year to encourage students to take a rigorous schedule of courses the senior year or to bolster the skills needs to enter college.

*To effect enhanced transfer among institutions, two-year institutions could share the names of its completers with all four-year institutions. This allows USHE to view transfers not on an institution-to-institution basis but on a state system basis.

Challenges

Culture

Demographics and cultural factors continue to work against our efforts as many of our students take a leave from their academic degree plan for church service, to work in order to provide for a spouse and/or family and because much of the burden to fund their educational cost lies upon their shoulders.

Data

Even though we have been requesting the same information for three years—it is always a battle to get the right information in a timely manner. This is due to the lack of accurate data, limited resources in institutional research and computing services, as well as the Banner conversion.

Resources

Sweeping improvements have been made with relatively little investment. Utah State University will be unable to sustain the first year retention rate increases we have achieved, without a continued institutional commitment to student persistence. If resources were available, USU could afford an At-Risk Student Identification Program, more advisors to decrease the student advisor ratio, an investment in learning communities, Early Warning Program, and second and third year retention initiatives.

What can faculty do to help? A discussion about posting mid-term grades, which Banner allows, has been held among the Council of Associate Deans. There is mixed reaction if faculty would be willing to undertake this duty although it would provide information that could be used centrally to provide intrusive advising and counseling to students who appear to be in academic trouble and who are in risk of leaving.

On the Horizon

Project Graduate

In a time of declining first year and transfer student enrollments, it becomes imperative in order to maintain the fiscal health of the University, that we retain our continuing student population. Much attention over the past few years has been given to our prospective and first year students. However, as noted in the Fall 2005 Day 15 report, more attention needs to be directed to second and third year students, to increase persistence and time to graduation. The literature suggests the importance of institutional commitment in student persistence. If second and third year students lack an academic path, career goals, and/or co-curricular activities they may begin to disengage, lose purpose, and, therefore, may choose to leave the institution. George Kuh (2005) and his colleagues in *Student Success in College* affirm that students who are engaged in active and collaborative learning, leadership, experiential internships, or research opportunities are more likely to succeed.

In a discussion with the Council of Associate Deans, the Provost Office suggested that USU look at the twenty institutions designated as Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) with the purpose of increasing institutional commitment among our second and third year students. We determined the importance of providing a these students a reason to come back. We believe we need to incorporate an ethos of graduating in four years in all our interaction and communications with prospective and continuing students. The faculty plays an important role in delivering these messages to our students. Furthermore, we need to design and invest in programs that encourage holistic academic planning and connections to a degree program.

Project Graduate will examine first year experience initiatives that should be continued to the second year, in addition to exploring best practices. This project will study the usefulness of a “Graduate in Four” public relations campaign, academic year checklists, and advising initiatives that target second and third year students and encourage them to graduate in an efficient manner.

Conclusion

To truly understand where we began, and how far we have come the last three years, it might be beneficial to review the information that was included in the previous two years reports which can be found in the Faculty Senate Archives.

We believe Utah State University has made tremendous progress in addressing crucial areas of concern in regards to retention and student success issues. However, when examining persistence and time to graduation indicators, there is always room for improvement. We believe in continual assessment and refinement of what is working and not working, and moving forward to address areas of concern. No single office or unit can alone enhance student success. Retention is everybody's responsibility and requires a ***coordinated and collaborative approach*** to improving the quality of student life and learning. We must ***rethink traditional ways*** of structuring the collegiate environment, and ***deepen the commitment of the institution, its faculty and staff, to the educational success of its students.*** (Tinto, 1987). One person can make a difference. Our individual, caring, supportive, daily activities are essential in helping students feel wanted and important. This connection is the key in retaining students at Utah State University.