

Retention Committee

Summary

The retention committee began the year by splitting into two sub-committees: one focused on quantitative assessment and one focusing on qualitative or cultural issues. Mid-year, the groups merged to focus on the large number of students on academic probation second semester. The retention committee wrapped up the year by making recommendations regarding a program to assist first-year high-risk students.

Report of Goals and Accomplishments

Below are the original goals of the Retention Committee as established in the Enrollment Management report of 2000:

Develop a Faculty Mentoring Program for High Risk Students.

The WISE project was a collaborative effort geared to provide mentors to students who entered as conditional admits. (OUTCOMES??) Project Synergy, an offshoot of WISE, is planned for Fall 2001. Synergy will incorporate elements of mentoring, supplemental instruction, and linked courses and will be delivered to 36 students on an invitation basis. The retention committee and ADSAAC also made recommendations to structure the first year experience as a condition for all students admitted with condition beginning in Fall 2002.

Share pre-entry characteristics with advisors and others with a need to know

Two initiatives took place during the year to focus on this initiative, though neither initiative was directly initiated by the Retention Committee. Ilona Reif (??TRUE) created a form that presented pre-entry characteristics in an easier to read format. ACT was invited to present a workshop on using these characteristics, but unfortunately tended to focus on selling their services.

Identify courses that have a higher failure rate and pilot Supplemental Instruction

Courses were identified and tutoring sessions were established to assist the students on probation their second term. Because the effort was a stop-gap measure, it would not be prudent to assess these efforts for incorporation into long term strategies. Supplemental instruction is still on the horizon as a goal for the Retention committee and will be piloted as part of the high-risk strategies in 2001-02.

Continue to refine “First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen” Model

The model was completed and demonstrated the key predictor to student success their freshman year (defined as non-probationary status) was high school GPA. (SHOULD WE SHOW DATA?) These predictive variables were included with the pre-entry information shared with advisors. (ROLLIN_-Lost track—did this info go to advisors during orientation? Do we know if it worked?)

Collect Retention Data/ Consolidate Survey Efforts

A data collection instrument to catalog initiatives was prepared by members of the committee, but has not yet been distributed to campus. Distribution will take place this fall.

Consolidating survey efforts has been difficult due to the varied nature and uses of the instruments in place. A movement is in place, however, to include identifying information on the student survey in order to link information with institutional data.

Other Accomplishments

Probationary Student Intervention

A widespread initiative to target probationary students prior to mid-terms was completed. This involved Residence Life staff targeting students to attend tutoring sessions, and advisors helping students determine whether they should drop courses to avoid further failing grades. While the probationary and retention statistics will be forthcoming, it is likely that this initiative, despite its good intentions, did little or nothing to help students. However there were some insights gained from the process:

- Because students register for spring semester courses prior to receiving fall semester grades, it makes sense for an advisory intervention to take place between the grade run and spring matriculation. Students who are enrolled in the next course of a difficult sequence, for example, should not be registered for the second course if they were unsuccessful in the first.
- Currently, students with high school GPA's of less than 2.75 are conditionally admitted. Fall semester 2000 data indicates that students between 2.75 and 3.10 do only marginally better than students under a 2.75. Of the 207 students with a high school GPA in this range, 49.3% of them were on academic probation after the end of the fall semester. This issue needs to be developed further to determine whether the range of students admitted with condition needs to increase or if more services need to be targeted to students with a GPA in this range.
- Culturally, it makes sense for support staff on campus to make academic linkages with students prior to trying to assist them when they need help. Programmatic interventions in the residence halls, for example, will include Resident Assistants discussing academics with students in general terms and a higher incidence of academic programming. This may make it easier to make later connections with students when they are on the brink of failure. While the colleges will always serve as the primary academic contact, it is important for students to know that others are focusing efforts on supporting their academic success.
- The higher incidence of probation at the end of the fall semester demonstrated a need to focus efforts on early intervention for high-risk students. The Retention Committee spent most of the Spring Semester focused on these efforts.

Establish Conditions for Conditional Admits

The Retention Committee focused efforts on establishing guidelines for conditionally admitted students. Students who are admitted with condition will be required to sign a contract and participate in an intensive first-year program geared to helping them acclimate to the university experience. The key elements of this discussion follow:

- Students will be assigned an academic advisor.
- The advisor will help the student enroll in a specialized series of courses. The courses are conceptualized to include a lecture course with supplemental instruction, a specialized freshman seminar, and a small basic skills type course such as freshman composition. (At this juncture four courses—two each semester - are proposed, but logistic issues are still being addressed).
- Students will be limited to 15 credit hours per semester. If students are successful their first semester, they may discuss the option of taking more credits their second semester.
- Students will arrive on campus one day prior to official opening to participate in a specialized orientation session.
- Students will be advised to limit their work hours first semester and assistance will be offered to help students find on-campus employment.

Still being considered is the mandatory nature of the participation (for example, are students suspended from the University for failure to participate?) The committee recommended language in the contract that enabled the University to suspend, but does not mandate suspension.

Also being considered is a parental notification option. Can the University make contact with parents on a case-by-case basis when it is believed that such contact could help their student?

Future Directions for Retention & Related Groups

The original charge to the retention committee focused on a broad approach to the issue and included elements of academic strategies, freshman programs and services, and data collection. It is perceived that the committee is at a crossroads and will need to establish direction and structure for the next year. Below are some issues to consider:

Grass Roots Retention Initiatives

One of the original goals of the Retention Committee was to help create a climate where retention initiatives were created from a grass roots perspective. While this has happened to some extent, there can be problems created when multiple groups are focusing on the same set of issues. Thus far, we have relied on informal relationships to maintain communication, but it may make sense to formalize some relationships. For example,

both the Retention Committee and ADSAAC were working simultaneously on the Admitted with Conditions Project—though from different approaches. It is important to note that the results of the work in this case did end up to be complimentary. In another instance, the group establishing Project Synergy and the Retention Committee were working on curricular ideas for students admitted with condition. In this case, there is some disagreement what the long term approach may look like.

Given the many retention type initiatives being created, it may make sense to establish formal relationships with similar groups through dual membership, or develop mechanisms to change team membership as initiatives are developed.

First Year Success Programs Team

The proposed First Year Success Programs Team can serve as a clearinghouse and provide coordination for first year student retention programming, including but not limited to Freshman Orientation, Week of Welcome, Project Synergy, University Admissions Requirements, and a First Year academic course. The First Year Seminar course concept will be developed collaboratively with the USP Review/Revision committee's work. An Academic and Students Affairs partnership, with equal representation from both units, has great potential to maintain and improve student retention.

Academic Success Center Implementation

The Academic Success Center concept is still regarded as the home to addressing the support issues for at risk students. It makes sense to continue efforts toward a goal of making this concept a reality.

Programs & Services for Transfer Students

The Retention subcommittee does not perceive transfer students currently have equivalent academic and/or social support systems as do first year students. A team focusing on transfer students should be formed fall of 2001. The charge should include issues such as: Who are our transfer students that require support (how many credit hours transferred, age, etc.)? Should non-traditional student be defined as the parameter of significance rather than transfer student?

Learning Communities Initiatives

The Retention Team programming and Learning Community Initiatives must be coordinated and complementary. Leadership for these two efforts should continue to overlap and is another example where dual membership is important.

Conclusion

The Retention Committee's experience this year is that it can't focus on every type of retention initiative from a program planning perspective. There are several organizational options that can be considered:

- Continue to focus the retention committee as a clearinghouse for retention initiatives and establish linkages with the major formal retention initiatives taking

place on campus (ie: ADSAAC, Synergy, Freshman Success, Academic Success Center, Transfer Success, Learning Communities). In this model, the role of the Retention Committee would be to channel communication so that programs and services are formally connected. Membership would be relatively stable linkages to each initiative, with members added or deleted as programs are refocused.

- Charge the Retention Committee to formally focus on a single initiative on an annual basis. For example, the committee could explore Supplemental Instruction this next year. In this model, membership would change each year based on the topic of focus.
- Formally disband the retention committee and establish groups to focus on targeted initiatives. In this model, there would need to be teams focused both on freshman and transfer programs and services.

The above list is not exhaustive, but looks at several models of how to structure the committee. Developing a model that best meets the needs and direction of the institution needs to be the primary goal this year.