

## **Academic Impressions Conference: May 21-23, 2012**

### **Developing a Comprehensive Retention Plan**

#### Conference Overview

Most institutions understand the importance of improving student retention but struggle with planning and implementing a campus-wide strategy that ties mission, data, and programming together into a unified approach. Comprehensive retention planning requires input and buy-in from multiple campus stakeholders including enrollment, student affairs, and institutional research.

Join our expert instructors to learn how you can build a campus-wide and comprehensive approach to improving retention outcomes. Whether you have a retention plan already in place or are just getting started, you will leave this event with the outline of a plan built from the practical tips and advice shared by our instructors.

#### **Summary of “takeaways” from UCSC conference attendees**

Increasing student retention requires creative thinking, collaborative planning, and a willingness to reshape university policies and practices.

Retention efforts depend on cooperation of academic departments, individual faculty members, Student Services staff, and university administrators.

Programmatic change must become the norm if a university is to successfully meet retention goals.

Changing patterns of student attrition, retention, and academic achievement challenges academics, budget planners, and university campuses to take risks and reshape traditions.

It is important to look beyond one's own campus and share ideas and insights with other educators.

Create a position that reports to a high level principal officer charged with implementing recommendations of the Task Force, coordinating retention activities, and being accountable for meeting the campus' retention and graduation rate goals.

Using data is important as we need to identify measurable outcomes, but also what inputs can be tracked in order to give UCSC a better idea as to which students are at risk and where the opportunities are for interventions and programs that will improve retention of the student must be identified. Therefore for coordinating information from admissions to graduation is highly critical as the admission requirements are linked to students being successful here at UCSC. What does UCSC do to collect this type of data and how is it disseminated to appropriate people such as advisers, professors, and retention programs? How is this information communicated with students to assist the student to make appropriate choices for course selection and outreach to appropriate services?

Create a data tracking system – or system that can be mined for indicators of students being at risk. There are software solutions for this.

Use admissions data (academic prep, other info) to determine types of services or contacts students might need. Reach out early to connect students to existing offices/programs or resources.

Do surveys with incoming classes to check for college readiness and other non-cognitive factors, use this information in advising.

Provide potential lists of students to offices on campus for outreach. Have staff invite students in.

Coordinate a 1<sup>st</sup> quarter early outreach to frosh by trained staff based on potential risk factors evident from their student profile.

The most predictive attribute of student retention is student academic success. Therefore, it is important for a university to carefully analyze its course expectations, the prerequisite academic skills, ways of knowing, and critical and analytical thinking strategies necessary for success in each course, and the most effective teaching strategies and academic support services needed to enable students to achieve and demonstrate appropriate learning.

Identify high D/F/W courses.

Centralized advising.

Develop common system for advisors so they can provide coordinated advising.

Honors programs for academically advanced students

Capstone courses

First year living learning communities – possibly using block scheduling.

Several conference leaders described programmatic change that resulted in increased retention. In each case, the program began with a very specific student retention goal, involved a clear intervention strategy, incorporated careful record keeping and qualitative and quantitative evaluation data collection and analysis, and was adjusted, retained, or discarded depending on its actual impact on student retention.

Several of the conference leaders discussed examples of successful retention programs focused on transition points such as Summer Orientation and Summer Bridge programs for incoming students, Focus on introductory courses wherein students must succeed in order to pursue a chosen major, initial and pivot-point academic advising, initially assisting students to experience

a sense of belonging on the campus, careful follow-up on students who stop-out, and engagement with families from pre-admission through graduation.

An institution of higher education that seeks to effectively educate its students must be learner centered. Enabling student success must take precedence in all decision making processes.

Create an early warning alert system to identify students in academic difficulty and initiate contact.

It is very important to understand which students are leaving and why. Therefore, careful continuous methods to collect, analyze, and share qualitative and quantitative data needs to be developed by a university. Conduct exit interviews or focus groups to better understand why students leave. Also conduct survey's with parents as they often give more accurate information

Keep institutional contact with students who withdraw and are intending to come back. Readmit calls to students not enrolled for next quarter.

Contact students who have almost completed their degree requirement but have stopped out and assist them to develop a completion plan.

Contact non-returning students.

### **Two short items from the conference literature that seemed particularly useful:**

Best practices (USA Group Noel-Levitz):

- Honors programs for academically advanced students
- Academic support programs and services
- Technical support to address on-line connection issues
- Orientation programs for 1<sup>st</sup>-year students
- Institution-wide emphasis on the teaching and learning
- First year experience program
- Program designed specifically for at-risk students
- Use of web-based course engagement tools such as Blackboard. WebCT. Etc.
- Tracking of persistence and progression patterns among students who matriculate

There is a 9-step work sheet to work through on Developing a Comprehensive Retention Plan. It has two main focuses, one on “Data Analyses and Need Assessment: Which students are at-risk for non-persistence, non-progression, or failure to complete their degree?” and the other is “Planning, Developing, and implementing Assessment and Evaluation.”