

Retention Taskforce Top Five Items and Obstacles

Jay Sorensen

1. Freshmen students with low index scores need to be attending tutoring services as soon as possible.
2. Math 1000 testing format needs to be revised and instructors given greater control over grading math tests.
3. Deans need to encourage their colleges to actively use starfish early alert program.
4. Peer Coaching Program needs greater involvement in the mentoring of FYE students (i.e. higher index students)

As far as obstacles, we need to shrink the size of the Retention Task Force until decisions have been made so we don't get bogged down by the myriad opinions and motivations of every department. We could break up who attends each week and interview specific departments and what they're seeing then make decisions accordingly. Once we know what we want to implement then bring back the whole task force and propose our changes and what possible problems we may have in getting them started.

Given that the Peer Coach Program is working specifically with our at-risk population, what I'm seeing is Math 1000 absolutely wrecking students and their confidence in the first semester. Resources have been given to our students to be successful, but ultimately they are not taking advantage of these services.

JD Robertson

1. Getting everyone on the same page, with the same goals. We need to communicate what these goals and objectives are to everyone.
2. Mandatory FYE course for all freshman taught by trained instructors.
3. Making to mandatory that student are unable to completely withdraw without first meeting with an Advisor/Counselor.
4. Focus on changing high failure courses.
5. Be realistic. Focus on what can be changed right now vs. what can be changed in 1-2 years from now.

Everyone has their own professional opinion and sometimes we get stuck on those opinions.

I believe that President Williams should say "We are making 'this' change" and then we get behind it and make it work. If not, we will just have hour long discussions that really don't accomplish much.

Bruce Harris

1. Collect data to determine why each of the 764 students who went to DSU last year did not return Fall 2017. Talk to each student via phone to ask probing, follow-up questions. MIC has already done this for minority students and the Student Success Center has also called many of the students. We need to understand as best we can the why questions (Why did the 764 students not return to DSU?) before determining effective solutions.

2. Focus on improving the student classroom experience. For most students, the classroom experience "is the primary experience of college and therefore the primary determinant of student success", according to Vincent Tinto, one of the leading researchers in the area of student success (<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Promoting-Student-Completion-One-Class-at-a-Time--Tinto.pdf>).

Ensure gateway courses are learner-centered instead of teacher-centered; focused on efficient, effective, and active learning. Redesign high-failure/high-enrollment freshmen gateway courses so they are engaging, effective, and personalized. Develop a "master course" for each gateway course that faculty would use to teach these courses, especially adjunct faculty. Currently over 50% of our courses are taught by adjunct faculty members and an even higher percentage of adjunct faculty teach freshmen gateway courses.

Tinto went on to say: "What would it mean for institutions to take student completion seriously? First and foremost it would mean that institutions would stop tinkering at the margins of institutional educational life and make enhancing student classroom success the linchpin about which they organize their activities. Rather than beginning the conversation about improving student completion with the question "What programs should we employ?" institutions would first ask "What is the nature of the educational experience we want our students to have in attending our institution?" and in turn ask "What then should be the nature of the educational settings in which we place our students, in particular the classroom, that would give rise to that experience?" Only after answering those questions, would institutions then ask "What initiatives would we take and in turn programs would we employ to construct those settings that would yield the educational experiences for our students that we desire?"

3. Adopt a healthcare model for advising students. Students have one advisor while attending DSU. Students go to their advisor for questions they have—if the advisor doesn't know the answer, the advisor finds out the answer and reports back to the student. The advisor acts like a quarterback (calling the plays) to ensure there is effective communication and support for students from the several DSU organizations/individuals interacting with students, i.e., faculty members, academic performance center, writing center, wellness center, housing, etc. This model must have a software application that facilitates communication between all organizations/individuals working with the students.

4. Require students to complete a FYE course their first semester that includes topics such as how to be a self-regulated learner, practical college and life skills, how to develop a life plan, grit, belonging, career planning, resources available at DSU, etc.

5. Ensure students complete a high-impact practice (a real-world project in their discipline, undergraduate research, service learning, etc.) or an applied, real-world collaborative project during their first year in which they are engaging with faculty members/other students in a significant way. Several curriculum and instructional researchers/experts recommend that first-year students take a course in their major in which they actually complete an authentic, real-life project similar to what experts in the field do in their professions. Instead of having first-year students take a survey course in their major (which is currently the predominate model) that is usually lecture-based, students work collaboratively with other students and the professor on a project in an active learning approach.

A list of the obstacles you see in preventing us from making informed yet quick decisions.

1. Lack of coordination and collaboration on campus between the many organizations/individuals implementing retention interventions.
2. Lack of conducting assessment/evaluation to determine the impact of retention interventions.
3. Lack of communication to faculty members and other stakeholders on campus concerning retention interventions.
4. Lack of follow through on retention interventions. Several retention interventions are implemented (such as the 1st Generation Student project) and then completely dropped with no follow-up or communication as to why it was dropped.
5. Lack of communication and collaboration between DSU strategic plan 2020 strategy action plans and ongoing organizations/individuals responsible for retention. Academic Affairs and Students Affairs do not seem to have a shared vision/goals and working collaboratively to achieve that shared vision/goals.

Del Beatty

A list of immediate items we need to focus on right now, as it pertains to retention:

1. Implement a mandatory FYE course with standardized curriculum
2. Require use of an Academic Advisor for the first 3 semesters
3. Establish a "Parents and Families" office to involve parents in the discussion of retention
4. Resolve the Math 1000 hurdle -- which students fail at high rates, and then lose their scholarships, etc.
5. Require faculty involvement and "buy in" to help with retention
6. The lack of college preparation for many of our incoming students
7. Increase the available services/resources to help students be academically successful

A list of the obstacles you see which prevent us from making informed yet quick decisions:

1. The lengthy process to implement new coursework and programs (FYE, etc.)
2. The authority to make a decision in order to keep a student here (scholarships, and financial aid, etc.)
3. Who will own it? (who is responsible for what?)

Nancy Hauck

Five things we need to focus on right now that will aid retention.

#1-Redesigning GE & High DWF Courses to Optimize Student Academic Success

#2-Advising in Proactive Student Caseload/Care/Accountability Model

#3-Designing Course Schedules to Optimize Student Access & Success

#4-Full-time Faculty Teaching 60%+ of Lower Division Courses Students

#5-New Student On-boarding Focused on Academic Skills & Belonging

Obstacles preventing us from making informed yet quick decisions.

#1-Students are Lost in the Mix. We need to put our students first and at the center of all decisions. As an open enrollment institution, we need open arms, minds, and hearts to care for, teach, inspire, and show regard for the students who attend DSU. No excuses or negative comments about our students, please.

#2-Lack of Prioritizing. We need to focus on the most important influences on success for *our students*; this includes teaching, advising, and essential support services. Our goal should be to deliver the best undergraduate education in the state.

#3-Complaining, Criticizing, and Comparing. We don't have time for negativity. This is our university. These are our students and our colleagues. Don't be part of the problem, be part of the solution.

#4-Lack of Accountability. A large committee is good for brainstorming and getting support across campus, but a few accountable people make things happen. We need to assign students to specific advisors and college or program leaders who are accountable for retention. Retention numbers should be shared frequently with stakeholders across campus. Middle Tennessee State is a great example of this.

DSU is participating in AASCU's Reimagining the First Year Initiative. Through this initiative, we could find the solutions to many of our problems and implement them to drastically improve retention.

Jeff Hoyt

Top Areas

We need a task force member to champion each major retention initiative, have the support of 2-3 assistants from the task force, develop proposals, budgets, the resources required and steps to be taken. Assign this out next meeting. Upon approval of the proposal by the task force, the champion takes it through all university approval processes and implements it.

The top areas that I recommend we take action on are as follows based on the data that I examined:

- (1) Restructure the Structured Enrollment Program
 - Require students with an index score of 50 or lower to be in structured enrollment and pursue an associates first on the path to the bachelors
 - Bring the structured enrollment program into the summer semester as a 'Jump Start' program when possible
 - Require a mandatory advisor session the 4th – 6th week of the semester
 - Mandatory study hall session
 - Make various other program changes to strengthen it.
- (2) Implement Mandatory/Revised FYE/SSC Courses and Experience for all new freshman
 - The program would have to be doubled as about half of the new freshman are currently in a student success or FYE course (about 35 more sections)
 - High ability students could take alternative student success courses (leadership, etc.)
 - Require a student needs assessment on the first day of classes/connect students to services
 - Require a mandatory advisor session the 4th – 6th week of the semester
 - Hire a director of the program
 - Provide funding for peer mentors
 - Implement a co-curricular component involving student affairs
 - Make various other program changes to strengthen it.
- (3) Reduce Academic Failure in High Failure Rate Courses
 - Make immediate changes in Math 1000; including hiring 4 new faculty to teach face-to-face sections (estimated need) versus computerized; offline test scoring for those who continue in computerized class
 - LIB 1010 is already being revised
 - Have department chairs provide proposals, particularly for Math, English -- as about 40% of non-returning failing students have failed these courses, along with LIB 1010
 - Study hall sessions/supplemental instruction should be part of the proposals where students work on assignments during an extra class session with assistance; mandatory
 - Provide stable and increased funding for study hall sessions/supplemental instruction

- (4) Recruit a greater percentage of the new freshman cohort in the middle and upper range, in terms of the index score
- Dramatically expand the Honors Program and use it as a recruitment tool with Honors scholarships, a focus on new freshman cohorts not continuing students
 - We already have several hundred students with a 3.7 HS GPA + on campus
 - Add another full-time staff member to the HS Concurrent Enrollment Program, with a “recruit to Dixie” emphasis and getting students connected in major programs
 - Expand recruitment of WUE and Good Neighbor students
 - Dramatically improve reported retention and 6 year graduation rates for bachelor’s degree seeking students to raise our ratings; low rates make it hard to recruit higher ability students
 - Focus on ways to fully capture exclusions, use military database; low index and students who intend to transfer are placed in a required associates program
 - Model out the effects of these actions to set goals
- (5) Pursue a Title III grant to help fund some of the initiatives
- Bring in experienced grant writers and copies of past successful grants

Mike Olson

Here are my top five with barriers:

1. Campus-wide, narrowly focused, communication plan for retention.
2. Robust first **and** second year experience. Freshman Orientation to major integration. Helping students transition into college and then helping them transition into their major—EFFECTIVELY.
3. Academic Recovery **Team** (not individual) to focus on students on Academic Warning, Academic Probation and Academic Suspension.
4. Balanced Advisor ratios that allow opportunities for meaningful intervention.
5. Data Driven Decisions.

Darlene Dilley

Here is my list of five retention items we need to focus on right now:

1. Mandatory advising at the beginning of each semester/year and 4 weeks into first semester
2. Mandatory FYE course for all incoming freshman students, including those starting spring semester
3. Reformat Math 1000 so it’s taught by faculty in the classroom
4. Require advisor meeting for complete withdrawals
5. Offer more second block course options, including Coop
6. Start working on Summer Bridge Program for at-risk incoming freshmen (sorry, that makes six)

Obstacles in making decisions quickly:

1. Finances. All of these initiatives will take extra resources – both in actual dollars and manpower.
2. Time. Getting people on board to lead and own specific initiatives when they are already feeling maxed out.
3. Getting buy-in, both staff and faculty. We need to everyone to see that retention is their responsibility.

Kelly Peterson-Fairchild

- A list of 5 immediate items we need to focus on right now, as it pertains to retention.
 - I think from our discussions it is clear that experiencing academic success and gaining some confidence early on is key. Programs paths need to be flexible and adapt to the needs of individual students. Clearly, some may need and want to take both English 1010 and Math 1050 freshman year while others may want to wait for one or both until later. Advisors need to have this option.
 - Create more faculty led study groups and study along with our successful peer academic success consulting.
 - Expand Honors Program to provide academic challenge and opportunities for growth.
 - Implement small debt forgiveness program (unpaid fees less than perhaps \$500) for those students close to graduation, with good grades and demonstrated financial need. These could be small finish line scholarships we could ask donors to fund. Financial aid would have the discretion to award these with no application process.
 - Mandatory first year orientation one week before classes begin.
- A list of the obstacles you see in preventing us from making informed yet quick decisions.
 - Fear of failure. We need to commit some resources to pilot projects such as the Starfish alert and assessment project that Jeff is doing with Rob in the Writing Center. These projects need to have measurable outcomes and be action oriented. Perhaps attach some mini-stipend funding for those who are willing to take on these projects??

Gary Koeven

Top retention items to focus on:

Increasing the ability of advisors, faculty, peer mentors and others with contact with students to work unitedly to assist each student. Banner Student Profile and Starfish tools will be helpful with this.

Improving face-to-face advising with students. Regardless of what predictive analytics or early warning systems may be put into place. I believe that we will find, over time, that the greatest positive impact on student success is one-on-one advising with students who are struggling. If we can't provide enough advisors to do that for every student, then we can use data to identify the groups of students where that personal intervention will have the greatest impact.

Work to fully implement and get maximum value from the technical tools we already have in place before trying to add new systems and tools.

Obstacles:

Departments going too many directions at once. When there are so many different initiatives and tool implementations moving forward at the same time it causes two challenges. 1) It is difficult to assess the value of each individual initiative, to determine which are the most effective, because there are so many variables changing at the same time and 2) It decreases the likelihood of successful implementation of all of the projects if there are many different tools and efforts being moved forward and not enough resources to do them all at the level that they should be done.

Inadequate numbers of both technical and functional personnel to implement technical tools. In a recent meeting with student affairs staff, It became very clear that not only are there inadequate Central IT personnel resources to do everything that they would like to accomplish but they also don't have adequate personnel in their own areas to work on the functional implementation of the products that they have licensed and are working to implement. As we move forward, we need to make sure that when a department requests a software tool or system, they also work to identify the functional-technical personnel requirements needed in their area and the central IT personnel needs and request additional funding to make sure that the implementation can be successful. Here is an example. In 2011, DSU Student Services brought forward a proposal to administration to purchase the degree audit program, Degreeworks. After investigating the personnel requirements for this system and recognizing that the central IT programmer analysts were already fully occupied with supporting existing systems, they included as part of the proposal, funding for an employee in Student Services to work on the functional implementation and funding for a central IT programmer analyst position to help with the technical implementation and ongoing support for this system. This was the last programmer analyst position added to central IT and yet many new systems have been purchased and requested to be implemented in the years since then. Not all of them require additional full-time resources but each of them takes a piece of the already oversubscribed personnel resources that we have.

Jeff Jarvis

5 immediate items:

1. Move to a personal ID number system for all registration screens, with advisors controlling access to the PIN numbers. It may be too late for Spring 2018 registration, but this could happen for Fall 2018 registration.
2. Move to a case load system of advising, to be fully implemented by Summer 2018. Attach each major to a major advisor, and each undeclared major to an advising center advisor.
3. Send a common message up through faculty senate, and down through deans and dept. chairs: to all faculty: do your students know their academic standing in your class at mid-term 2017? If not, please find a way to communicate this immediately. If so, please reach out to those in danger of earning a D or F. Invite them to take advantage of Student Success Center. Ask faculty to follow-up these conversations with brief emails to Jeff Hoyt, copying chair and dean.
4. Follow-up to number 3: Deans follow-up with Chairs, identifying faculty who are unwilling to engage. Deans follow up with direct conversations with those faculty.

Obstacles:

1. Chain of command is confusing. Which VP? Which division? Example: is advising in Academic Affairs, or Student Affairs?
2. We do not have a unified, focused messaging to students. Each area communicates what is most relevant to its own programs. I suggest a 12-month experiment: everyone, from the custodians to the President, when talking to students, intentionally notes the over-riding goal of academic success. Everyone. Faculty, Chairs, Deans, Admin support staff, cashiers, recruiters, advisors, VPs, Student Government, Student Life, Club officers. Everyone. We all need to 'connect the dots' for our students. Help them keep focused on success.

Mo Eckroth

There was a discussion last week that we should be steering students toward Math 1030. Unless a student knows what they are going to get their BA/BS in, then taking Math 1030, 1040 or 1050 could be a wasted class. Only a few of our majors Math 1030 would be the only Math class required. Most of our majors require Math 1040 because there is a second Stats class, and some require 1050 (so 1030 and 1040 would end up being an elective)...and some require both.

I think we need to be careful not to make a blanket advisement that Math 1030 is the class to take.

We need more 2nd Block classes and when a student has an F grade, be encouraged to drop and add a block class that they can realistically pass.

Advisors should be trained in FA implications of adding and dropping (FA FERPA release) classes. You would rather they drop a class than get an F, but in the spring it could mean they lose an academic or school FA award for the following year. Student can appeal...but they do not read the email that indicates they have lost their award. They would still have to take summer school to make up hours. Some lose an award, so they do not return, when it is fixable.