

# Retention Task Force Proposal: Enhanced Early Alert System

## I. Introduction: Summary Statement

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Establish a comprehensive Early Alert System that involves the entire campus community: students, faculty, staff and parents—a system that is approved and promoted by the executive leadership down through the university organization.

## II. Statement of Need

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Colleges and universities that have improved retention rates “quickly focus on the underutilization of the resources they have already” by establishing early warning or alert systems (University Leadership Council, 2009, p.9). Dixie State University loses nearly half of its freshman after the first year. About 1 in 3 freshman and approximately half of those who fail to return the next fall are experiencing academic failure (GPA below a 2.0); The other half have additional reasons for discontinuing; students transfer back to an institution near their home or elsewhere in the state. It is critical to identify at-risk students early, those who are experiencing academic failure, financial troubles, engagement issues and other personal hardships to connect them to existing programs and services and to provide support (University Leadership Council, 2009). This requires the engagement of the entire campus community. For every 23 students we intervene with and save, the retention rate currently improves by 1%.

## III. Description of the Program and Changes

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### **Current Program**

The Early Alert System at Dixie State University is currently being fully implemented and expanded. As a part of the Reimagining the First Year Initiative, Starfish was to be used to “identify issues in the 4-6<sup>th</sup> week” (DSU Final Report, 2016, p. 8).

The focus was on first year freshman in English 1010, Biology 1010, entry level math courses, FYE and SSC courses to “reduce the reporting burden on the faculty at large” and create better faculty buy-in as recommended by the national University Leadership Council (2009, p. 26). Academic advising made a commitment to meet with the students for academic concerns. Student Success Center staff resolved non-academic or behavioral flags. Staff in the Student Success Center met

with Starfish support staff, the department chairs in biology, math and English and the director of advising to work out a plan. About half of the faculty participated by raising flags in these courses and departments after communication efforts.

Success Center Staff also met with the directors of the International Student Center, Multicultural/Diversity Center, Student Housing, instructors teaching SSC 1020 and their peer mentors, along with residential hall assistants to train them on the system. We asked these individuals to set flags on students as well, including peer mentors and resident hall assistants. Referrals for the writing center, career center and tutoring services are also being set up in the system.

The Success Center also has a Student Concern Form on its website, outside the Starfish system. Upon approval by the university attorney, the Information Technology Office sent an email to all parents and students at the university, who then identified students having difficulty. (See message in the appendix.) All of these referrals and non-academic flags in Starfish were given to an assistant director in the Student Success Center and two retention counselors (success coaches). They met with the students and referred them to services when needed, often walking them over to the Health and Counseling Center, Disability Resource Center, tutoring centers, etc. Students at risk to themselves or others, those with substance abuse issues, suffering criminal offenses were referred to the dean of students or campus police as needed.

Early alert initiatives also included a new student questionnaire, response, and list of services given on the first day of classes in SSC courses and sent to all new freshman online. The peer coaches in SSC classes reviewed the results during their first visit with students. It was an instrument to identify at-risk students (academic, financial, personal problems, study habits, excessive work, etc.). Peer coaches walked students over to the services. This questionnaire will also be put in Starfish as an intake form.

An upgraded version of Starfish was implemented, which has greater capabilities. Success Center staff trained advisors to send a comment to faculty who made referrals so that they would know the outcome. When two advisors sent comments back the same day, saying only that they sent an email to the student, we notified the advising director to wait a week, and have those advisors send a note to the faculty when they had made an appointment or met with the students. One of the concerns from faculty is that the advisors don't communicate the outcomes with them. Deans could also ask the advisors in their colleges to communicate better with the faculty in their own

colleges. It appears that academic advisors did not respond to flags sent later because they then began to respond to midterm grade reports.

Another early alert effort involves reaching out to students each semester who will be purged for non-payment. This was also done this fall to reduce student dropout. Peer mentors in the Student Success Center begin their contacts with students when they are admitted to the university. This next year, we will be adding in an effort to get them to fill out a FAFSA, when we know that is not completed (report run in the system).

The Student Success Center peer coaches will also contact students who fail to register for the next semester, after initial efforts made by advisors. They will gather information on why students are not returning, but also ask if there is anything we can do to retain them. We will attempt to meet their needs through referral to staff on campus as appropriate.

### **Requested Changes**

- Peer mentors in FYE classes have an early alert role. We had no funding for them in this program, so several sections had no peer mentors, given that it was on a strictly volunteer basis. We need to obtain more peer mentors through an expanded volunteer program (possible contracted service to obtain them) or by paying more students to be peer mentors in FYE classes.
- Establish a mandatory policy for students to meet or call their academic advisor or the Student Success Center when withdrawing during the semester.
- Establish a mandatory policy for students to meet or call their academic advisor or the Student Success Center when withdrawing from the university after a semester is completed. Not all will comply, but many will do so as a result. The advisor or retention counselors (success coaches) could be a last point of contact to try and resolve concerns to retain students, but also communicate important information for withdrawal by having students complete the withdrawal form.

The withdrawal policy could be communicated to students during FYE and SSC classes. See the SUU example in the appendix for information that could be covered in the class. Students are currently required to complete a Student Withdrawal Form, which is then processed without the requirement to talk with someone. The web page at Dixie State University needs to be upgraded to provide a warning about the implications for withdrawal with content similar to that provided

by SUU. We only have the form on our website. An automated web interface could calculate the amount that students will have to repay in federal aid and display it. The Banner table that captures data from the withdrawal form needs to allow for more than one reason because students often list several reasons for withdrawal. Federal exclusions should be captured at this point in time (church missions, joining the military, foreign aid service, etc.) The web page then would have information on who to call.

- Establish a reporting system to identify students requesting a transcript to transfer (University Leadership Council, 2009). Success Center staff can contact them and refer some students for faculty mentoring in an effort to retain them.
- Develop a training video on the overall university alert system to be shared with faculty and staff.
- Implement the advisor appointment scheduling component of Starfish that provides a web-based interface for setting and tracking appointments and kiosks. Reasons for visits and speed notes can be implemented.

## IV. Resources

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Implementing the changes above requires additional IT programming support for the web-based Student Withdrawal Form. IT resources are needed to manage the appointment scheduling component of Starfish and kiosks located in advising centers across campus, along with uploading relationship files into Starfish.

The Center for Teaching and Learning has volunteered to develop a video for the early alert system.

A commitment would be needed for faculty mentors.

## V. Larger University Context

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One component of the early alert system is part of the Reimagining the First Year project: 4-6<sup>th</sup> week academic flags. However, early alert goes beyond this as described above to include the campus community in general and non-academic or behavioral concerns.

## VI. Outcomes and Assessment

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A reporting process is being developed to track the number of students referred or flagged, the concerns and interventions that are taken. The retention rate can be tracked for those flagged. It may be possible to identify students with academic concerns who were not helped in the 4-6th week window to compare retention rates. Non-academic or behavioral concerns are not readily identifiable without a flag, so there is no comparison group of students with the same issues.

## VII. Conclusion & Decision-Making

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Executive leadership can provide approval for a withdrawal policy and communication of a formally approved early alert system to the deans, chairs and faculty. Additional IT support is needed to fully implement this initiative. The provost could provide formal support for faculty mentoring and a process to refer high ability students to mentoring from early alert efforts.

**References**

University Leadership Council. (2009). *Hardwiring Student Success: Building Disciplines for Retention and Timely Graduation*. The Advisory Board Company, Washington D.C.

## **Appendix: SUU Website for Complete Withdrawal**

### **Withdrawal from the Academic Term**

Students are permitted to withdraw totally from the academic term any time prior to finals for the semester.

A student withdrawing after the 14th class day of the Fall/Spring semesters will have a "W" recorded for each course for which he/she registered. For Summer term, please contact the Registrar's Office for more information regarding withdrawal dates.

Southern Utah University does not allow a student to drop or withdraw from their final course without completing a separate withdrawal request for the semester. During the first nine weeks of the semester a student may withdraw from any or all of their courses. After the ninth week a student may not withdraw from an individual course, but must withdraw completely from all of their courses for the semester.

As you consider withdrawing from Southern Utah University, it is important to be aware that your withdrawal can affect your academic, personal, and financial records and responsibilities in a variety of ways. You must review these considerations before you may begin the withdrawal process.

### **Emergency Withdrawal**

SUU recognizes that circumstances beyond the control of the student may so significantly impact a student's academic work that an Emergency Withdrawal from the term is necessary. Students who encounter these circumstances may be totally withdrawn and request a refund of a portion of their tuition and fees. To make such a request a student should:

- complete the Emergency Withdrawal Request form
- attach a written personal statement explaining, in detail, the extenuating circumstance and the specific refund request (if a student simply wishes to withdraw without requesting a refund they may follow the instructions above under Withdrawal from the Academic Term)
- provide documentation of the extenuating circumstance (doctors note, police report, etc.)
- submit the completed packet to the Registrar's Office

### **Withdrawal Considerations**

**Registration Related Deadlines:** Be sure to check registration related deadlines to get a full understanding of when you can and cannot register for additional classes and when you can and cannot receive a refund of tuition. All other questions may be directed to our Registrar's Office at 435-586-7715 or registrar@suu.edu.

**Transcripts:** Your transcript will show a 'W' for all the classes you withdraw from. This can cause red flags for future employers. If you are intending to transfer to another institution, you

must order your official transcripts via mySUU Portal. There is an \$11 fee associated with the order/processing and can be sent as a printed version or electronically. All financial obligations and holds must be cleared and the appropriate fees received before a transcript request can be processed. The Registrar's website has more details about transcripts and a full explanation of grades, codes, course numbering, etc., used in transcripts. All other questions may be directed to the Registrar's Office at 435-586-7715 or registrar@suu.edu.

**Financial Aid:** If you have received any type of financial aid, there may be a possibility of owing back money to the federal government. The Financial Aid office will administer a student's R2T4 (Return of Title IV Funds), which is a complex calculation that determines how much the student can keep based off the time that student attended SUU. Your R2T4 calculation will be mailed to you and your remaining account balance will post on your mySUU Portal, where you may also set up a payment plan. Please contact the Financial Aid office for further assistance at 435-586-7735 or finaid@suu.edu.

**Loans:** If you have taken out a student loan, you are required to begin repaying that loan after a 6-month grace period. In addition, you will need to complete an Exit Loan Counseling program. If you need to negotiate any loan terms, you will have to contact your loan lender directly. You may find your assigned loan lender on the National Student Loan Data System. Please contact the Financial Aid office for further assistance at 435-586-7735 or finaid@suu.edu.

**Scholarships:** If you receive any type of institutional scholarship, and intend to return to SUU, you will lose that scholarship upon return (unless you have a University excused deferment). Be sure to check the requirements of each individual scholarship (e.g. departmental, private, housing, etc.) and contact the Financial Aid office for further assistance at 435-586-7735 or finaid@suu.edu.

**On-Campus Housing:** If you live on campus, you will need to visit University Housing in the Eccles Living Learning Center and speak with Teresa Andrews. In addition, you will be required to have a Resident Assistant perform a room inspection before you can complete your check-out. Failure to do so, will result in extra fees determined by University Housing. Once withdrawn, you will no longer have access to your assigned building and room, as your T-card will be reprogrammed. Lastly, you will need to pay out any remainder of your housing contract. This cost will be adjusted onto your account balance with any remaining tuition/fees. Please contact University Housing for further assistance at 435-586-7966 or housing@suu.edu.

**Off-Campus Housing:** If you live off-campus, please contact your landlord/property management for a proper check-out. Some may require that you find a replacement to take over your contract, otherwise, you will have to pay out the rest of your agreement. Every off-campus housing provider has different policies, so we advise you to contact them directly.

**University Meal Plans:** If you have purchased a university meal plan, any refund will follow the registration related deadlines. Depending on when you withdraw, you may be responsible to pay the remaining cost of your meal plan, which will be readjusted onto your account along with any remaining tuition/fees. Please contact the Cashier's Office at 435-586-7720 or cashiers@suu.edu.



**On-Campus Jobs:** If you currently work on-campus, you will no longer be employed in a student position at SUU. Contact your supervisor directly to determine whether they would like to keep you as a 'Non-Student Hourly Pay' position. Please contact the Human Resources office for further assistance at 435-865-8572 or [hraid@suu.edu](mailto:hraid@suu.edu).

**University Resources/Amenities:** Understand that you will no longer have access to many University resources and amenities including, but not limited to:

Counseling and Psychological Services

Speech and Presentation Center

Writing Center

Tutoring Center

Health and Wellness Office

Disability Resource Center

Non-Traditional Student Services

Student Support Services

**Parking Services:** If you have purchased a parking pass, you will not receive a refund.

**Career Center:** You are no longer eligible to receive services such as mock interviews, resume reviews, or career assessments, however, you are welcome to attend SUU Career Fairs. Please contact the Career Center for further assistance at 435-586-5420 or [careercenter@suu.edu](mailto:careercenter@suu.edu).

**Library:** You are no longer eligible to check out library materials for free, however, you may purchase a library patron card and become a 'Friend of The Library' for an annual fee. Please contact the Gerald R. Sherratt Library for further assistance at 435-865-8240 or [library@suu.edu](mailto:library@suu.edu).

**Athletics:** You are no longer eligible to attend athletic events for free, however, you may purchase a public admission ticket at every athletic event you choose to attend.

**Student Involvement and Leadership (STIL):** You are no longer eligible to attend any SPB events, with the exception of 'The Scream,' where you may purchase a public admission ticket. Please contact the STIL Office for further assistance at 435-586-7762.

**SUU Outdoors:** You are no longer eligible to participate in SUU Outdoors free trips and adventures, however, you may continue to rent outdoor equipment.

**Campus Recreation:** You are no longer eligible to utilize the PE Building for free, however, you may visit the 'PE Equipment Center' for individual fees of any recreational activity you choose to participate in. Also, students who purchased a Fitness Center pass, will not be refunded. Please contact Corry Nielsen for further assistance at 435-586-7833.

**Student Clubs/Organizations:** If you are a member of a student organization on campus, notify them that you will be withdrawing from SUU out of courtesy. In most instances, any annual dues

paid, will not be refunded. Please contact your specific organization(s) directly for more information.

**International Students:** If you are an international student, you will need complete the Request to Transfer Out form. This includes paying all outstanding balances with SUU, meeting with your Territory Outreach Manager, changing your immigration record, and providing copies of your new school's admission letter and transfer form. In addition, you will need to complete an Exit Questionnaire. Please refer to the Request to Transfer Out form. For all other questions, please contact International Student & Scholar Services at 435-586-1995 or [internationalaid@suu.edu](mailto:internationalaid@suu.edu).

**Veteran Students:** If you are a military-connected student using VA benefits, under Chapter 33, you must pay back any and all allowances including housing stipends, book stipends, and tuition and fees (except in the case of mitigating circumstances). Please contact the Veterans Resource and Support Center for further assistance at 435-865-8477 or [veterans@suu.edu](mailto:veterans@suu.edu).

**'Intend to Return' Students:** If you are withdrawing from the semester with the intent to return to SUU, it is important to know the duration of your absence:

Students who plan on being gone for one semester, please notify the Coordinator of Student Connection and Completion during your 'Withdrawal Support' meeting. Failure to return the following semester, will result in a termination of your admissions at SUU. You will need to re-apply completely and pay a \$15 re-application fee. Keep in mind, a student's re-admission into the institution is not guaranteed. Please contact the Admissions Office for further assistance at 435-586-7740 or [adminfo@suu.edu](mailto:adminfo@suu.edu).

Students who plan on being gone for more than one semester for plans such as military service, a church service mission, or any life circumstance(s), will want to complete the Admissions Deferment/Leave of Absence Form. Completing this form will allow you to postpone your attendance for up to five semesters (not including summers) without having to re-apply or pay the \$15 re-application fee. During your absence, it may be a good idea to complete a Release of Information Form. Completing this form will allow your parent/guardian to transact business and ask questions on your behalf. Please contact the Admissions Office for further assistance at 435-586-7740 or [adminfo@suu.edu](mailto:adminfo@suu.edu).

**DSU Students and Parents,**

**As we near midterms this 2017 Fall Semester, we would like to reach out to each of you to make you aware of Dixie State University's [student concern form](https://parentresources.dixie.edu/student-concern-form/). Whether you are a concerned parent, friend, or student, the form is one way that you can share that you are concerned about a student. Fill in as much information on the form as you can. Someone from the Student Success Center, or their designee, will reach out to provide the student with support and resources. If you would prefer to discuss your concern with someone directly, you can call the Student Success Center at 435.879.4691. Please note that if you provide your contact information, we may get in touch with you to get more information prior to contacting the student. We do everything we can to preserve your anonymity if you choose to remain anonymous.**

**Please be aware that this form goes to the DSU Student Success Center during normal business hours. It is not monitored after hours, on weekends, or on University holidays. DSU has Campus Security available to respond to immediate concerns. If you have immediate concerns about the health or safety of a student of the DSU community, call Campus Security at 435.619.1144. If there is an active emergency, call 911 immediately.**

**If the link above does not work, copy and paste this URL into your web browser:**

**<https://parentresources.dixie.edu/student-concern-form/> .**

**Tiffany Draper**

**Assistant Director of Student Success**

**Orientation, Family Programs, Early Alert**

**435.879.4651 Browning 113**

**Dixie State University**