

April 13, 2017

To: Rae Linda Brown
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From: Teresa Ciabattari
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Re: Update on Retention Mapping Project

This spring, I have been tasked with mapping PLU's retention efforts across campus. This allows us to assess where work is being done, what is missing, and how processes can be improved. I have met with individual faculty, staff, and administrators in the Academic Division and in the Division of Student Life; additional meetings are scheduled in the coming weeks. In these conversations, I have gathered information on the grassroots work that units are doing to support student success and on perceived holes in these efforts. What policies and procedures have proven to be effective? How can these successes be scaled up or adapted by other units? What else can PLU be doing, or doing better, to support student success?

A main theme emerging from these conversations is the deep interconnectedness between the work of every unit on campus. Academic success is related to social integration and belonging, to mental and emotional health, to financial support and stability, to having a sense of purpose, and to food, housing, and transportation security. When one of these pieces goes missing, student success is threatened. PLU students are navigating complex intersections between their academic, social, personal, and family lives. In order to be effective, PLU support services and retention efforts need to engage with students holistically. A student may benefit from academic coaching, but if she is also struggling financially or experiencing mental health challenges, that academic intervention will have limited effectiveness unless these other needs are also addressed. My conversations with PLU faculty and staff have underlined the need for a coordinated and multifaceted approach to student success and retention.

Although this retention mapping project is ongoing, the work so far highlights three areas of consensus on needed improvements. The faculty and staff with whom I spoke were nearly universal in identifying these areas as priorities for better supporting student success.

First, almost everyone I spoke with said that PLU could do a better job collecting data, analyzing data we already have, integrating data from across units, and using these data to inform policies and interventions. For example, the Office of Admission has extensive information on students. We can use that information, and integrate it with institutional data in our Banner system, to run predictive analytics on the incoming class *prior* to New Student Registration in June and New Student Orientation in September; this analysis can then inform how we work with students during those initial experiences on campus. In

addition, students have different levels of attachment to and belonging at PLU before they even arrive. Relative to students whose parents attended PLU or who have participated in a Lute OverKnight, students who have never been to campus, or who have visited only for an hour or two, may need different kinds of advising and different kinds of support to ensure their connection to the PLU community. This information from the Office of Admission is a rich source of data that we have not been using to its full potential to support students on the path to success right from the beginning. Similarly, are there differences in student success between those who participate in on-campus New Student Registration and those who register over the phone or online? How can we assess this, controlling for other relevant factors, and then adjust policies and practices to help more students be successful? These early data sources can be leveraged more effectively to help our students get started on the right foot.

Another example of a gap in how we use data is related to Mapworks, a student success software program that collects survey data from students in their first few weeks at PLU to gauge their academic and social adjustment and to predict their risks of poor academic performance and of non-persistence. Students who have completed the surveys, and the residence assistants and commuter community advocates who follow-up with students to review their Mapworks results, give decidedly mixed reviews on the effectiveness of the tools. A working group of staff and faculty are in the process of reviewing Mapworks, both as a service that provides predictive analytics to inform our retention efforts and as program that we implement through a specific follow-up protocol intended to impact individual student success. In particular, there is interest in integrating Mapworks, or a similar tool, more centrally in PLU's administrative structure and in using the data to not only support individual students, but to develop effective programs and policies.

Second, PLU faculty and staff recognize the need for equity, responsibility, and accountability in relation to student success and retention. Grassroots efforts to support students take place on a daily basis across campus. Many of these efforts emerge from the initiative of individual staff or faculty members. There is a perception that part of the PLU culture is to assign work tasks to an individual, rather than to a position. This can limit the institutionalization of effective practices and discourage shared purpose across units. It can also contribute to inequitable workloads in which certain staff and faculty members are shouldering heavy burdens that are unsustainable. Staff and faculty would like to see PLU focus on working "smarter, not harder." How can we reallocate resources to do needed work rather than adding more tasks to already full plates? Similarly, how can hiring processes for new staff and faculty prioritize professional qualifications related to student success and how can the formal and informal support provided to students by staff and faculty be better documented and rewarded in review and promotion procedures?

Finally, PLU faculty and staff articulate a clear need for professional development related to student retention. This can take multiple forms. Faculty are interested in learning more about inclusive pedagogies and about working with students from diverse backgrounds. They also express a strong need for training related to student mental health – how to identify warning signs and how to help students connect with appropriate resources. One

staff person calls for more “cross-training” across units so that we can be more nimble and holistic in how we respond to student needs. Staff also express interest in expanding their role as mentors for student employees.

Although these three areas of consensus emerged in my conversations so far with faculty and staff, other issues were also mentioned. For example, PLU can assess which features of the student experience, such as New Student Orientation, on-campus New Student Registration for students living locally, and participation in a Transitions to PLU course, to make mandatory for all students. We may also be able to do a better job supporting students in fulfilling their PLU entrance requirements prior to the start of fall semester, so that they don’t start their college experience already academically behind. Several colleagues also mentioned formal mentoring programs as a potential high-impact practice; this could include both peer and faculty/staff mentors for students in specific identity groups, such as students of color, first generation college students, and parenting students. Of course, this would also require that PLU work to diversify our staff and faculty so that mentors are available to work with our students.

I have appreciated the opportunity to learn from my colleagues about their work and to hear their perspectives on how PLU can evolve our efforts to support our students. I look forward to continuing with the project through early summer.

PLU Retention Map June 2017

This map was developed using a list of retention practices adapted from the “What Works in Student Retention” survey of institutions of higher education conducted by ACT¹. Additional information was integrated from the research literature on student retention. PLU practices were identified from interviews with PLU faculty, staff, and administrators and from the PLU website during spring 2017. Because new retention initiatives were being developed while the creation of this map was underway, some of the recommended revisions (and others) may already be in progress.

In addition to the specific practices identified in the map, several broader themes also emerged in the interviews with PLU staff and faculty across campus:

- *The need for coordination:* Units must work together to more effectively and efficiently support student success. Students should also hear consistent messaging about the PLU experience from first contact through graduation, and their experiences at PLU should live up to this messaging.
- *Being proactive rather than reactive:* A common perception is that PLU policies and practices related to retention and student success are reactive rather than proactive. How can we create accountability and follow-through?
- *Identifying multiple pathways to success:* Not all students need the same kinds of support. How can we tailor high impact practices to the diverse needs of PLU students?
- *Responsibility and accountability:* many of the retention efforts in place have been developed by individual initiative and are not necessarily institutionalized or shared across units. Who is responsible for these efforts and how can accountability be maintained?
- *The need for streamlining:* More is not always better. PLU works hard to support student success but many of these efforts can be streamlined to avoid overlap and information overload for students. For example, it would be effective to develop a single online dashboard where new students find everything they need to know about registration, residence halls, orientation, and finances, rather than receiving separate emails from each unit.
- *Creating a culture of student success:* Faculty, staff, and administrators should demonstrate respect for students in every interaction and should treat students equitably.

¹ ACT. 2010. *What Works in Student Retention? Fourth National Survey: Private Four-Year Colleges and Universities Report*. <http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Retention-PrivateFour-YrColleges.pdf>

Retention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>First Year Transition</i>		
Summer Orientation	New Student Registration (NSR)	About 30% of students register via Skype or phone calls. How can more students be encouraged to participate in person (e.g. host a weekend event, funds to help out-of-state students travel to campus)? Is mid-June the appropriate date (is it too close to high school graduation?)?
Extended First Year Orientation	New Student Orientation (NSO)	How can we make it mandatory for students (e.g. assign 1 course credit as part of FYEP)? How can we help students see the benefit of it? How can non-resident students and transfer students be fully integrated?
First Year Seminar(s)	FYEP Program	Better integration of FYEP 190 into the program and more consistent 190 experiences across sections. More sections of FYEP 101 taught by tenure line faculty. How can FYEP be used more explicitly to connect students to resources?
Living/Learning Communities	Linked courses (FYEP 101, PLUS 100)	Ensuring students understand the purpose and vision of the linked course; better communication with faculty about what these courses require from them; better integration of non-residential students into these communities (i.e. what would learning communities designed for them look like?).
Parent/Family Orientation	Family Orientation (part of NSO)	Develop targeted programming for families of non-residential students.
<i>Academic Advising</i>		
Training for Faculty Advisors	Optional workshops	Institutions have more success when they attend to the "selection, training, evaluation, and reward of advisors." How can we better onboard new faculty advisors? How can academic programs be more intentional about assigning advisors to first year students? How can faculty advising be assessed for quality (not only quantity) and be rewarded in tenure and promotion processes?
Training for Professional Advisors	Ongoing professional development	
Advising Interventions with Specific Student Populations	Transfer Student Advisor; PLUS 100; PLUS 200	Are there other student populations who could benefit from cohorting in PLUS 100? What other ways can advising be targeted to specific groups (e.g., pre-nursing)?

Retention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>Academic Advising (continued)</i>		
Integration of Advising with First Year Transition Program		Can we more intentionally scaffold first semester and second semester required meetings (e.g. LuteConnect, advising, FYEP 101/190)? Would some students benefit from working with advising teams, made up of their academic advisor, FYEP 101 instructor, PLUS 100 instructor, RD/Commuter Connection Director (and is this feasible when so many FYEP 101 instructors are contingent faculty)?
Academic Advising Center	Academic Advising	
Integration of Academic Advising with Career/Life Planning		How can Career Connections be better integrated with academic advising, academic programs, and the Wild Hope Center? Are there additional career services that our students need that are not being provided?
Using Technology in Advising	CAPP Report	Creating an academic dashboard for students, a single place where they can see their academic progress, connect with advisors, and connect with instructors.
Recognition for Faculty Advisors	Service expectation in some programs; Faculty Excellence Award in Advising	How can faculty advising work be more visible (beyond the number of advisees) and assessed for effectiveness? Excellence award is given to one faculty member per year. Are there other ways to reward more faculty more often?
Recognition for Professional Advisors		
Specified Learning Outcomes for Advising	Advisor/Student Role Descriptions	Do first year students understand the role of their academic advisor? Do they understand how the roles of their admissions counselor, student services counselor, and academic advisor differ?
Four-Year Course Planning	Academic Advising	Can we require all students to develop a path to graduation in their first year? How can we make this accessible and flexible, e.g. developing an online and editable document linked from CAPP/Banner? How can we make the two year course cycles more accurate and more user-friendly (perhaps saving them as Google Spreadsheets rather than Excel documents to allow for streamlined updating)?
Online Advising System	CAPP Report	

Retention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>Career Planning and Placement</i>		
Career Exploration Workshops or Courses	Explore!; PSYC 213	Helping students see connections between coursework and careers is a best practice. Should Explore! be a four-year, scaffolded program? How can academic programs include these connections in their curriculum?
Internships	Through academic programs or AICE; Career Connections; CCES	In a survey of private four-year institutions ² , “giving students practical work experiences in their intended major (e.g. internships, volunteer work, experiential learning, service learning)” was identified as the most effective retention and completion practice. How can PLU make unpaid internships more affordable for more students, particularly over the summer months? What alternative practical learning experiences can be offered or enhanced? How can these experiences be more accessible to first and second year students?
Individual Career Counseling	Career Connections	
<i>Mentoring</i>		
Peer Mentoring		
Faculty Mentoring		
Staff Mentoring		
Community Member Mentoring		Informal mentoring is widespread. Formal mentoring programs are not. Can they be used to help develop community and provide support to students who have a harder time connecting to informal resources?

² Ruffalo Noel Levitz. 2015. 2015 Student Retention and College Completion Practices Benchmark Report for Two-Year and Four-Year Institutions. Coralville, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Retrieved from <http://www.noellevitz.com/BenchmarkReports>.

Retention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>Academic Support</i>		
Placement Tests	Math and Foreign Language	How frequently are they assessed for accurate placement?
Supplemental Instruction		How can supplemental instruction be integrated into gateway courses, e.g. BIOL 205?
Summer Bridge Program	Summer Academy, 2015 & 2016	Identified in the Ruffalo Noel Levitz survey (see footnote #2) as a least-used effective strategy for four-year private institutions. Continue to assess the most effective bridge program for PLU students. What alternative models could be cost effective and best support student success?
Developmental Coursework		Can we require students to fulfill unmet Admissions Requirements (Math and Foreign Language) before fall semester (e.g. take summer classes at PLU or at a community college)? [Note: Recommended by ARTS in 2014-2015].
Honors Program	IHON	The IHON program is an important recruitment tool and is effective in supporting student success. Are there features of this program (e.g. cohorting, community-building, academic support) that can be scaled up for other programs?
Math Center	Math Lab	Do the students who most need these resources use them? How can students be incentivized to use these resources? How can we ensure they are accessible to all?
Writing Center	Writing Center	Do the students who most need these resources use them? How can students be incentivized to use these resources? How can we ensure they are accessible to all?
Foreign Language Center	Language Conversation Tables Academic Assistance Center; Drop-In Labs	
Tutoring		
Study Skills Course or Workshop	PSYC 110	Can this be required for students on academic warning and probation? What about students with GPA below 2.5?
Academic Coaching		Identified in the Ruffalo Noel Levitz survey (see footnote #2) as a top 10 effective strategy that is under-used by most institutions. The development of persistence coaches for high risk students was recommended by ARTS in 2014-2015.

Refention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>Academic Support (continued)</i>		
Early Warning System	Progress Alerts	These are severely underused, and many faculty confuse them with Student Alerts. We should explore making these mandatory (like the former midterm warnings), but earlier in the term. Athletics and advisors especially miss the former system. To be effective, an early warning should be automated and tracked, with clear criteria for the alert (e.g. number of absences, poor performance on initial assignments, etc.).
Midterm Progress Reports		Students would benefit from mandated progress reports, around weeks 4-5, to allow time for improvement. See comments in Early Warning System above.
Performance Contracts for Students in Academic Difficulty		How can we outreach to students with GPAs between 2.0 and 2.5 to support their academic success? What additional resources can we offer, e.g. required J-term workshop/course/retreat (perhaps 1-credit?) for first year students below 2.5 GPA?
Library Orientation	FYEP 101	
<i>Financial Aid</i>		
Pre-Enrollment Financial Aid Advising		
Financial Literacy Workshops		Students express interest in these workshops; however they were identified in the Ruffalo Noel Levitz survey (see footnote #2) as a least effective practice.
Short-Term Loans		Assess need for this resource. One model for implementation: https://www.washington.edu/financialaid/types-of-aid/loans/short-term-loans/

Retention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>Faculty Development</i>		
Pedagogical Techniques	New Faculty Orientation, Faculty Development Workshops	Time constraints make participation in workshops difficult for many faculty. How can we better support faculty in this work, e.g. creating more online resources? Can we create a section of the eFAR specifically for faculty development to better track faculty participation in these efforts?
Equity and Inclusion	New Faculty Orientation, Faculty Development Workshops, Implicit Bias Training	Can we ask all new hires (faculty and staff) to complete implicit bias training? How can we support the next steps in this work? Who is responsible for ensuring this work continues?
Effective Assessment of Student Learning	New Faculty Orientation, Faculty Development Workshops	See comments in Pedagogical Techniques above.
Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum	FYEP, Faculty Development Workshops	See comments in Pedagogical Techniques above.
Use of Technology in Teaching	PLUTO, Instructional Designer	Are faculty using these resources? Are there other professional development areas, such as in inclusive pedagogies, that need similar investments of resources?
<i>Data Practices</i>		
Predictive Analytics		How can we use the wealth of information from the Admissions process (e.g. academic preparation; attachment to PLU [deposit date; number and type of campus visits; etc.] to identify students in need of supports and connect them to appropriate resources (including PLUS 100, appropriate advisors, etc.) prior to enrollment. Can we use the summer to make connections with students and invite them to be part of the PLU community?
Course-Level Data		The Buffalo Noel Levitz (see footnote #2) survey found that institutions identifying courses that are more / less difficult to complete is a most effective internal operations practice and is underused by most institutions.

Retention Practice	PLU Practice	Comments & Questions
<i>Data Practices (continued)</i>		
Student Tracking	MapWorks (first years)	Term-by-term persistence tracking was identified by Ruffalo Noel Levitz as one of the most effective internal management practices (see footnote #2) and Halualani & Associates describe it as a standard practice that should be in place at most institutions. How can PLU improve processes to automatically report on and track student progress? Who is responsible for following up on these reports? Can advisors receive lists each semester with the names of advisees who are behind in credits, GPA <= 2.5, and/or had alerts from the previous semester so that they can help support the student?
Retention and Graduation Outcomes by Group		Continue with multivariate assessment of retention and graduation outcomes by student populations and academic pathways (e.g. majors, types of courses, transfer paths) in order to develop appropriate interventions.
<i>Campus Climate</i>		
Belonging & Inclusion		Conduct regular assessment of campus climate for students and staff and use the data to develop appropriate interventions. Continue to educate faculty and staff about bias and equity in higher education.
Hiring and Review Practices³		Do job descriptions and review processes, for every PLU employee, emphasize that it is important for candidates to demonstrate commitment to student success and to equity and inclusion? Can our interview and review processes make the need for this skill more transparent? How can this skill be assessed and rewarded?
Institutional Integrity		Is there congruence between PLU's mission and stated values and the day-to-day experience on campus with faculty, admin, staff, and students (Braxton et al. 2013)?

³ In Braxton et al. (2013) four of the nine imperatives for student success and retention, developed from extensive research, are related to ensuring that students are treated with respect and in an equitable manner by university employees. See *Rethinking College Student Retention*, Jossey-Bass publishers.