EAB

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success

Building Ownership for Student Progression Among Individual Faculty and Distributed Academic Units

Academic Affairs Forum

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About EAB

The Education Advisory Board (EAB) is a division of The Advisory Board Company, the leading provider of comprehensive performance improvement services for the health care and education sectors—including research and insights, business intelligence and analytic tools, management training, and consulting support. Drawing on over three decades of experience, The Advisory Board Company is privileged to serve a membership of more than 3,500 organizations, including preeminent hospitals, health systems, and universities, all sharing a charter “above commerce” and an unyielding insistence on continual improvement.

Within EAB, we work with over 700 college and university executives across North America.

About the Academic Affairs Forum

The Academic Affairs Forum is a member-based organization that provides best-practice research and market intelligence for provosts and vice presidents for academic affairs.

We offer our members expert advice and innovative strategies for tackling their most pressing issues, tested and proven to work by their peers at other institutions across the country. Rather than reinvent the wheel, our members benefit from the learning of thousands of other colleges and universities facing the same challenges.

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Supporting Members in Student Success

Resources Available Within the Academic Affairs Forum

Whether by public mandate, financial necessity, or commitment to mission (and more often than not, a combination of all three), every institution is under greater pressure to improve student outcomes. To date, however, few have articulated a clear, organization-wide strategy to improve student persistence and completion rates—relying instead on small-scale programming and the efforts of specialized support offices.

The Academic Affairs Forum has compiled an extensive library of best practice studies, white papers, implementation guides, and toolkits to support our members in creating an effective student success strategy. Find the resources below on eab.com or contact your EAB dedicated advisor to learn more.

A Student-Centered Approach to Advising

Redeploying Academic Advisors to Create Accountability and Scale Personalized Intervention

This white paper explores the evolving role of advisors in addressing student retention and completion. Two in-depth case studies illustrate how caseload-based success coaching and data-driven risk modeling can dramatically improve outcomes.

Guiding Student Choice to Promote Persistence

Tools, Technologies, and Policies That Support Retention and Timely Completion

This best practice study applies the concept of choice architecture to student success, outlining how progressive institutions are using subtle policy changes and self-service tools to encourage better decisions among students.

Hardwiring Student Success

Building Disciplines for Retention and Timely Graduation

Our original and most comprehensive study on student success, this report discusses the structure of early alert systems, intervention strategies, and policies to improve time-to-degree.

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success

Building Ownership for Student Progression Among Individual Faculty and Distributed Academic Units

Our latest study profiles models for faculty-led reform to reduce curricular barriers for students and target advising and mentoring toward disengaged students.

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Beyond the Academic Affairs Forum

Additional Resources and Services for Institutional Leaders

Beyond our work with chief academic officers, we are privileged to serve over a thousand colleges and universities across a wide breadth of issues. Our research and insights forums provide strategic guidance for leaders within functional areas such as business affairs, continuing and online education, student affairs, advancement, enrollment management, information technology, and facilities. EAB also offers industry-leading technology collaboratives and data and analytics capabilities to help our members drive change on their campuses.

Research and Insights

Advancement Forum
Breakthrough-practice research and data analytics to help maximize philanthropic giving and support institutional goals

Community College Executive Forum
Strategic advice for chief executives to improve student success outcomes, win future enrollments, and build sustainable college enterprises

IT Forum
Research and advice for CIOs on leveraging information and technology to further the higher education mission

Business Affairs Forum
Research and support for chief business officers in improving administrative efficiency and lowering costs

Enrollment Management Forum
Best practice research and analytics to support enrollment managers as their scope of responsibilities expand

Student Affairs Forum
Research for student affairs executives on improving student engagement and perfecting the student experience

COE Forum
Breakthrough-practice research and market intelligence to help universities grow continuing, professional, and online programs

Facilities Forum
Best practices and executive networking to elevate space forecasting, utilization, and service quality

University Systems Forum
Research for system leaders to understand the challenges faced by systems and institution-level best practices

Academic Affairs Forum
Strategic advice for provosts on elevating performance in teaching, research, and academic governance

Performance Technologies

University Spend Collaborative
Business intelligence and price benchmarking to help colleges reduce costs of purchased goods and services

Academic Performance Solutions
Data analytics service to help academic leaders identify opportunities to improve resource allocation and efficiency

Student Success Collaborative–Campus
Academic advising platform and predictive analytics for four-year schools to identify and intervene with at-risk students

Student Success Collaborative–Navigate
Student onboarding and academic planning platform for community colleges to enhance student persistence and on-time graduation

Executive Summary

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success

An Organizational Dilemma—Who Owns Student Success?

No one unit, office, or individual can truly "own" student retention and completion, given the incredible complexity of students' experiences on campus. From enrollment management and student affairs to advising offices and undergraduate colleges, dozens of organizational units on campus can (and should) stake a claim to student success. Making a meaningful improvement in retention and graduation rates requires extensive coordination among all of these stakeholders.

Central investments in support staff, technology, and new services make only a marginal difference when they are not embraced or fully adopted across campus. The student success literature is now replete with well-documented recommendations for improving outcomes, but practices and technologies are only as powerful as the culture in which they are implemented. Many high-impact practices are stuck in small-scale pockets on campus or have simply faded away over time, as grant funding and enthusiasm dissipate.

Without engagement among faculty, most top-down student success initiatives are doomed to fail, either through outright opposition or because of a limited reach. Critical reforms that pertain to curricular requirements, academic policies, advising practices, and transfer articulation all rely on the willingness of faculty to redesign the institutional approach and carry out a new set of procedures, but many academic administrators have neglected to involve faculty from the outset.

While it is well-known that faculty-student interaction is key to student success, few institutions have clearly articulated expectations for the academy in supporting persistence. Everyone supports student success in principle, but in practice, aiding the institutional cause requires clarifying exactly what behaviors are required of individual faculty members and academic units.

The Role of Academic Units, Committees, and Task Forces

Academic administrators should provide comprehensive data tools to academic units to allow for self-study, but conduct separate analyses to inform curricular changes. Providing easy-to-use data on enrollment and progression removes the lag time associated with one-off institutional research requests. Instead of relying on self-regulation, however, the provost's office should evaluate curricular changes or policies independently (with their impact on students in mind).

Central student success committees should assign discrete tasks to smaller, skill-based subgroups. Rather than relying on a large, inclusive committee to identify, investigate, and solve persistence-related problems on campus, academic leaders should divide these responsibilities among project-focused groups that leverage interested, capable faculty.

Pilots rarely last—ensure that seed funding initiatives and taskforces have support to fully scale reforms across campus upon completion. Individual faculty members and working groups tasked with creating solutions to address student retention need financial and logistical support from the administration. Providing project management support and requiring that all initiatives culminate in full-scale adoption within a reasonable timeframe ensures that pilot programs do not falter.

Executive Summary (cont.)

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success

The Role of Individual Faculty Members and Instructors

The most important responsibility of individual faculty members is to enhance the student learning experience. Pedagogical innovations shown to improve student success are abundant on many campuses, but instructors often lack the training or the support needed to replicate those innovations in their particular context. Administrators should reduce the opportunity costs of experimentation in the classroom and leverage faculty leaders to expand effective teaching techniques across departments.

Faculty utilization of early warning systems to identify at-risk students depends on their flexibility and on their perceived impact. More than three quarters of colleges and universities in the US have developed or purchased an early warning system, but they are woefully underutilized. Allowing faculty members to customize the threshold for academic risk and the intervention protocols can help to expand the ranks of willing participants. The provost and academic deans must reinforce the importance of early alerts among faculty, and demonstrate their impact on getting help to students in a timely matter.

Student support efforts tend to target the most- and least-at-risk students; faculty-student mentoring should address those in between. If students fail to establish a meaningful connection to campus in their first year, they are more likely to struggle as they enter the upper division. Targeting faculty mentoring programs toward students who are academically on track, but not engaged in a learning community or student organization can help to build broader involvement among this critical group.

Sustaining Momentum Through Accountability and Evaluation

Institutional metrics to assess student success fail to capture unit-level performance or motivate improvement among academic departments. Individual academic departments often control significant aspects of student success-related activity, from advising to supplementary instruction and curricular requirements. Their performance is not captured effectively, however, by overall retention and completion rates. Leaders should evaluate unit performance in a way that corrects for student migration between programs and lower-division attrition that is often out of their direct control.

Require unit leaders to report annually on progress toward agreed-upon goals and share best practices across campus. Central administrators can signal the importance of distributed leadership on student success by holding annual meetings in conjunction with budget planning that focus on retention and completion strategy. Deans and unit leaders can ensure that their efforts are aligned with each other and with the goals of the institution writ large, and senior leaders from the president to the provost’s council can recognize each unit’s improvement according to the prior year’s established goals.

Assess and incentivize academic units according to their performance on concrete outcomes that are directly addressable within their purview. The best way to create accountability among academic units is to designate specific operational metrics (such as the share of first-year students who file a degree plan, or the share of students who met with their advisor) for which they are responsible. Performance against these measures should be reported transparently and rewarded in a meaningful way—even small financial incentives can send a message to faculty and unit leadership that even in difficult budget climates, student success is an urgent priority in need of their attention.

Introduction

The Student Success Silo Problem

An Organizational Dilemma

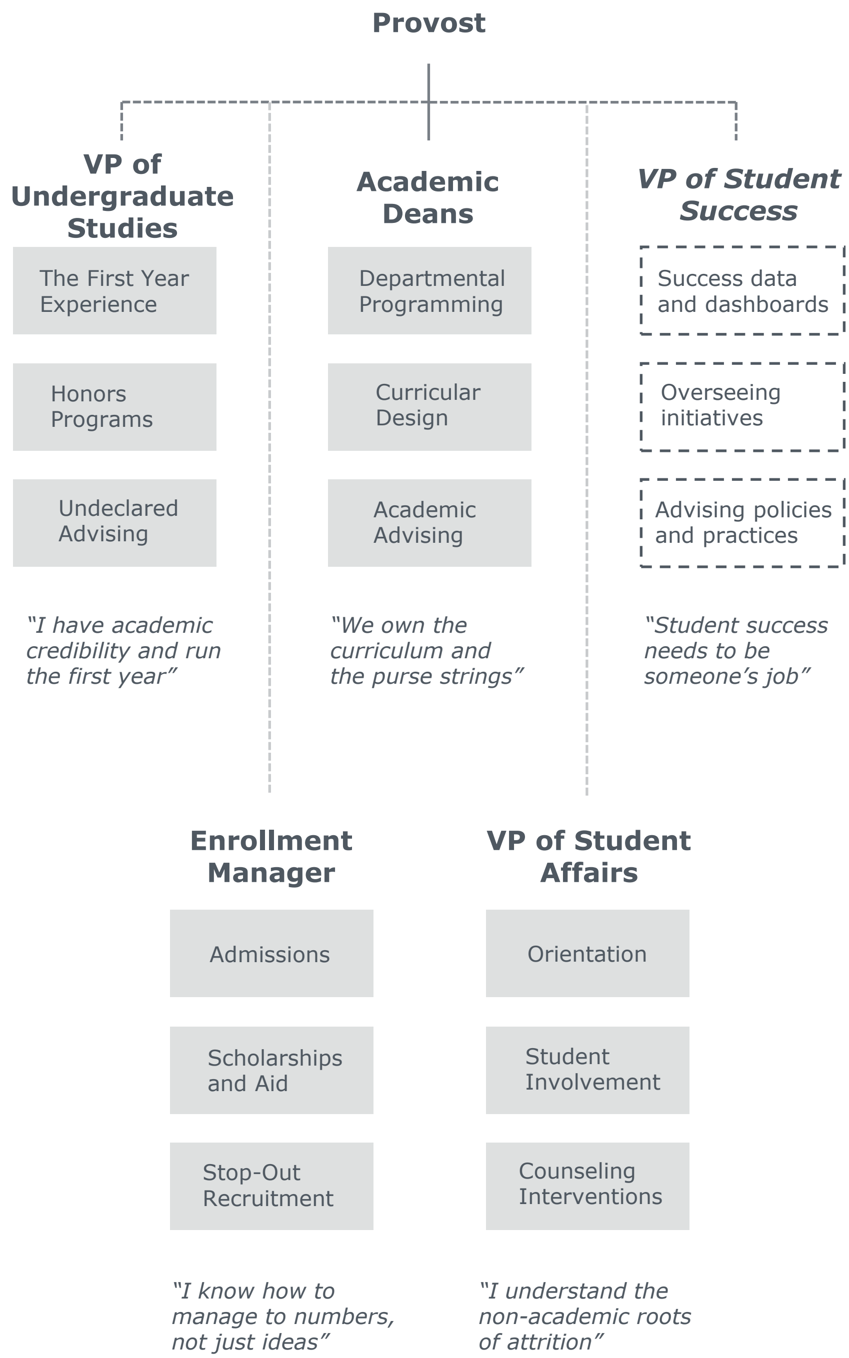
"If it's everyone's job, it's no one's job." This sentiment is all too common among academic leaders struggling to build a clear, coherent student success strategy on campus.

Given the hundreds (if not thousands) of variables that impact students' likelihood to graduate, however, responsibility for their ultimate success is necessarily diffuse. Each of the leaders and organizational units depicted on the right have important roles to play, and an effective institutional approach to student success must involve coordination among each constituency.

To that end, administrators with "student success" in their title are beginning to emerge, helping to bring academic units, undergraduate education, enrollment strategy, and student affairs efforts into alignment. While most of these newly appointed leaders lack significant decision-making authority or purse strings, their growing presence in higher education signals an increasing desire among provosts for accountability beyond mere rhetoric.

While no one person or office on campus can claim total responsibility for retention and completion outcomes, little progress can be made without delineating the *specific* roles that each leader plays in impacting the student experience.

Who "Owns" Student Success on Your Campus?



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

All the Pieces in Place

As the number of leaders sharing responsibility for student success grows, so do the number of initiatives, policies, and practices designed to assist students on campus. Most institutions can list dozens of ongoing efforts in this area, drawing from decades of literature on high-impact interventions known to improve student persistence.

One state university system recently conducted a thorough audit of 113 known best practices (several of which are included on the right) on each of their campuses, with the hope of helping each institution improve on sub-par graduation rates. By identifying gaps in implementation on each campus, they thought, the system could prioritize areas for investment.

What the system found, however, was that each campus claimed near-universal compliance with the list, despite its length and comprehensiveness.

Self-Reported Activity Suggests Nearly Universal Adoption of High-Impact Practices

System campuses compile list of 113 known best practices

Chancellors asked to select those already existing on campus

Self-audit results in nearly complete compliance with list

Recommendations for Increasing Retention and Graduation Rates

	Campus A	Campus B	Campus C
1. Identify at-risk students prior to enrollment	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Offer special summer programs for high-risk students	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Ensure sufficient introductory course capacity	Sometimes	Yes	Yes
4. Connect students with peer mentors in their program	Yes	Yes	---
5. Ensure adequate student-to-advisor ratios	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Ensure adequate student/advisor ratios	--	Sometimes	Yes
7. Monitor transcript requests to identify potential transfers	Yes	--	Yes
8. Offer multiple learning community opportunities	Yes	Yes	Sometimes
9. Require departments to develop degree maps	Yes	Yes	--
10. Require faculty to track student absences	---	Yes	Yes
…**113.** Mandatory exit interview for leavers	Yes	---	Yes

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Existence Does Not Equal Effectiveness

If each institution could report adoption of nearly 100 high-impact practices, what could explain the campuses' poor performance on student success in comparison with peer institutions serving similar populations?

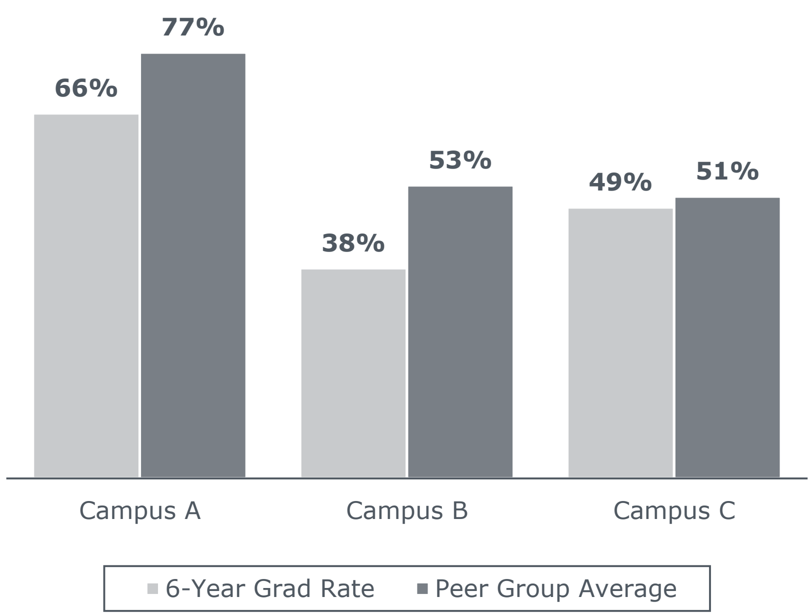
As system leaders lamented, the answer likely lies in the critical difference between the mere *existence* of a practice or policy on campus, and the *effectiveness* of that effort as executed by the faculty and staff held responsible for it.

Our understanding of the current state of student success strategies in higher education revolves around this fundamental disconnect. On any college campus, wide-spread awareness of both the root causes of attrition and the interventions known to work is common. What is less common, however, is the collective will to prioritize those interventions over competing demands, and to sustain them over time.

Without a culture that actively places student success at the center, most initiatives will live on only in file cabinets and institutional compliance reports such as this one.

No Shortage of Best Practice Programs in Place, but Little to Show for It

Despite Prevalence of High-Impact Practices, Each Campus Lagged Behind Peers



Checking the Box

"Either these things are only happening one or two places on campus, or they're written down on paper somewhere but not actually in practice. Something doesn't add up."

Vice President for Academic Affairs
State University System

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

A Similar Story Nationwide

This phenomenon—greater investment "on paper," but limited results on campus—is not limited to isolated campuses or even systems. It is reflected across the higher education landscape, as evidenced by the data shown to the right.

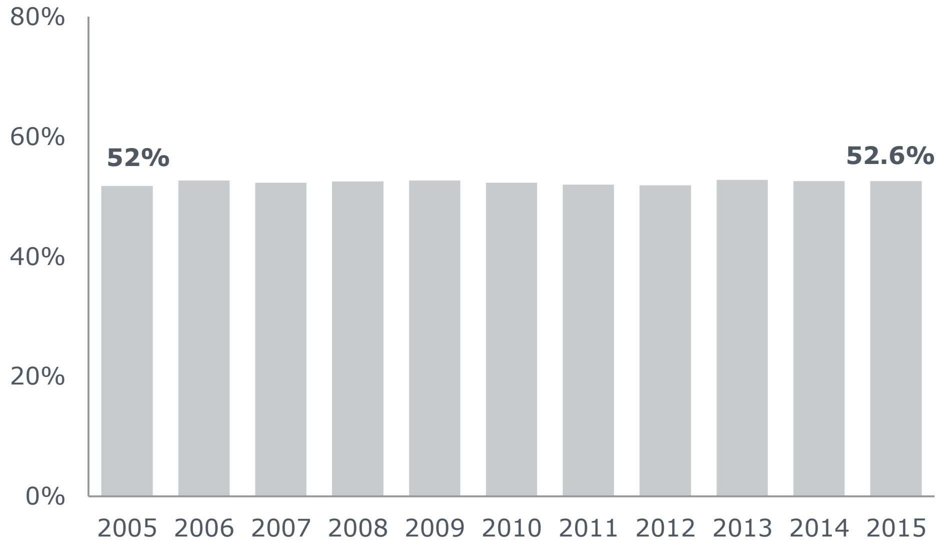
Despite double-digit annual growth over the past 15 years in the amount colleges and universities spend on non-instructional student services (such as advising, counseling, orientation, and supplementary instruction), graduation rates among first-time, full-time students over the same time period have remained flat.

While these data notably fail to account for transfer students and the growing population of non-traditional students entering higher education, they provide a clear picture of how difficult it can be to *maintain* student outcomes over time, much less improve them. Many administrators report feeling as though they need to "run faster to stay in place," as each entering class is comprised in larger parts by first-generation college students, students in need of financial support, and students balancing coursework with employment and familial responsibilities.

Flat Graduation Rates, Despite Significant Student Service Investments

Average Five-Year Graduation Rates

Public and Private US Universities



Note: Data reflects share of first-time students who have received a bachelor's degree within 5 years

11%

Average growth in student services spending per student FTE AY 2001-2011

Source: ACT Research; Delta Cost Project, "Trends in College Spending, 2001-2011: A Delta Data Update," 2014.

Top-Down Changes Rarely Stick

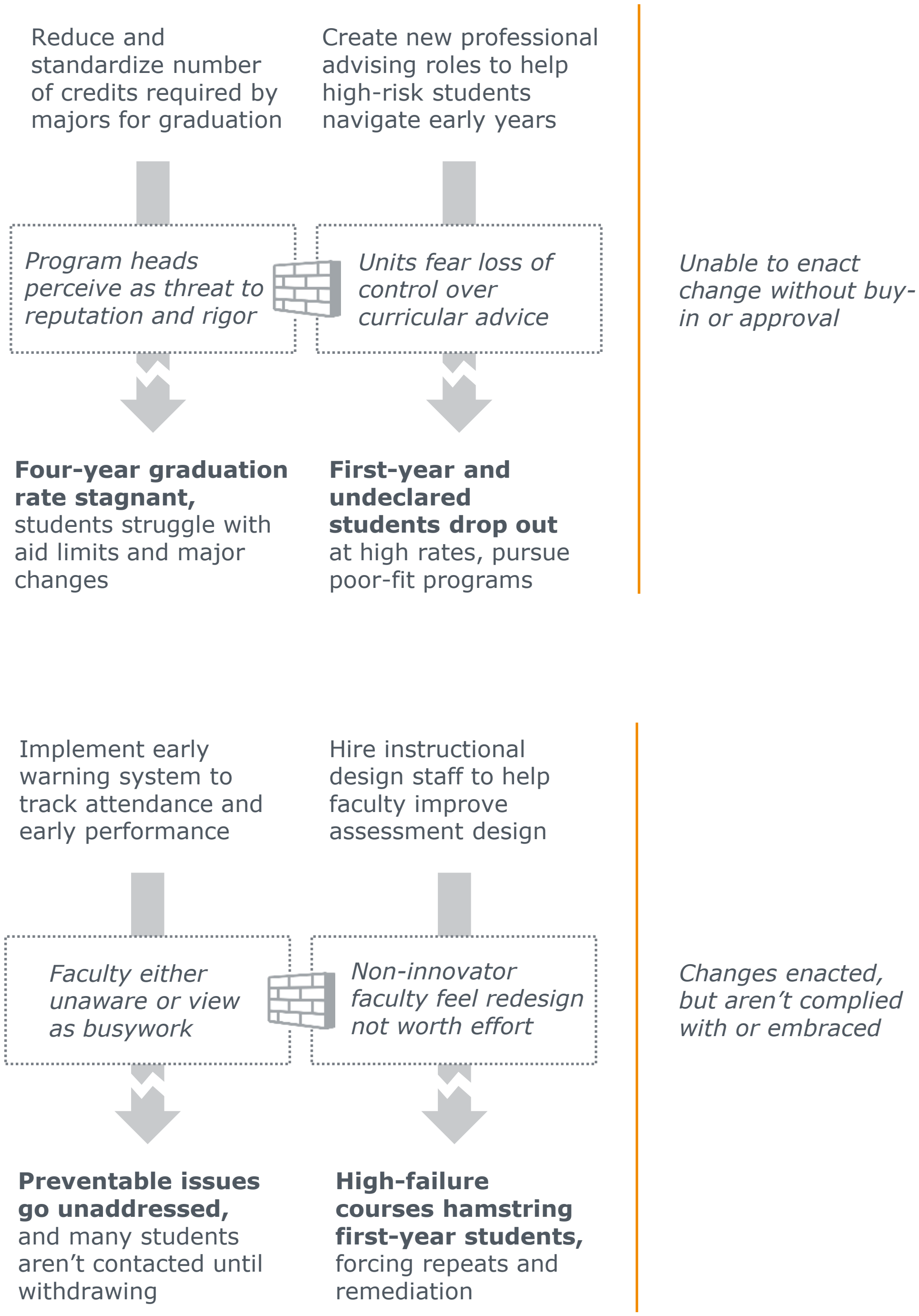
The widening gap between institutional spending and demonstrated results on student success is explained in large part by the inadequacy of "top-down" change. Strategic plans, new technologies, and revised processes are too-often short lived because front line faculty and staff are uninvolved in their development.

Efforts to revise overly complex or burdensome program curricula, or to invest in professional advising staff, for example, are stymied from the start by academic leaders fearing a loss of control.

Even where administrators are able to move forward with change—adopting an early warning system or developing course redesign initiatives, for example—the will to engage deteriorates over time. Weighed against dozens of competing incentives and demands on their time, few faculty are likely to neglect their scholarly responsibilities in service of greater early alert compliance rates.

Faculty engagement is central to change from start to finish—and without a sincere effort to enfranchise the academy in student success, few investments will show lasting results.

Faculty Buy-In and Compliance Critical to Organizational Improvement



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Faculty at the Center of Student Success

By any definition of student success—from blunt retention metrics to life-long fulfillment—research has demonstrated a strong link between faculty activity and student outcomes.

Umbach and Wawrzynski, in "Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement," suggest that faculty-student interaction is frequently among the best predictors of both learning outcomes and term-to-term persistence.

Research emerging from Gallup and Purdue University's collaboration on long-term student outcomes underlines that message, showing that close faculty-student relationships result in significantly greater levels of happiness and engagement later in students' careers.

The unfortunate dilemma, the authors note, is that too few college graduates report having those relationships. Their power may be beyond question, but colleges and universities are only at the beginning in trying to ensure that every student feels engaged, supported, and connected throughout their career.

Research on Retention and Long-Term Well-Being Confirms Critical Role

Contributing to Persistence

"In accordance with Chickering and Gamson, several researchers documented the strong association of both formal and informal faculty-student contact to enhanced student learning. **These interactions influenced the degree to which students became engaged with faculty and were frequently the best predictors of student persistence** (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini; Stage & Hossler, 2000)."

Paul Umbach and Matthew Wawrzynski

"Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement"

Contributing to Well-Being

"[I]f graduates had a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams, their odds of being engaged at work nearly doubled, as did their odds of thriving in their well-being … **Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates … Yet few college graduates achieve the winning combination**. Only 14% of graduates strongly agree that they were supported by professors who cared, made them excited about learning and encouraged their dreams."

Great Jobs, Great Lives

The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report

Source: Paul D. Umbach and Matthew R. Wawrzynski, "Faculty Do Matter: The Role of College Faculty in Student Learning and Engagement," *Research in Higher* Education (2005); "The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report," Lumina Foundation (2014); EAB interviews and analysis.

Engaging the Academy to Drive Change

Academic Affairs Forum research on student success has evolved over time in alignment with the questions members have asked us; those questions, fittingly, mirror the narrative described in this introductory section.

Our first examination of student success focused, at member request, on the central infrastructure necessary to identify and intervene with at-risk students. The list of policies and procedures aimed at improving student retention was shorter at this point, and leaders needed direction on the capabilities required to respond to student concerns.

Given the limited reach of those central capabilities, our membership asked how they might help more students *help themselves*. We published *Guiding Student Choice to Promote Persistence* in response, detailing best practices in self-service academic planning.

As we have argued, the next stage of evolution must place faculty and institutional culture at the center. This report, and the practices and resources contained within, represent our desire to help members tackle that challenge.

Increasing Importance of Faculty Engagement Reflected by Evolution of Member Questions

Student Success 1.0

“**What infrastructure do we need** to create accountability for student retention, identify at-risk students, and ensure on-time graduation?”

Hardwiring Student Success (2009)

Student Success 2.0

“**How can we ‘help students help themselves’** through self-service advising tools, mobile reminders, and degree-planning resources?”

Guiding Student Choice to Promote Persistence (2014)

Student Success 3.0

“**How can we encourage academic units and individual faculty** to address barriers to student persistence within their individual areas of influence?”

Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success (2016)

Three Critical Questions

In what follows, we will address three critical questions relevant to cultural change on campus.

First, what can the academy as a collective do to support their institution’s student success goals? Academic units, governance bodies, and committees make innumerable decisions pertinent to student progress, but few administrations consistently equip them with the tools necessary to align those decisions with student need.

Second, what can individual faculty members do to improve student success? Beyond their traditional role as instructors, faculty members can be leveraged as mentors and members of cross-functional campus teams to build a better support system for at-risk students.

And third, how can leaders ensure that cultural change “sticks,” resulting in the expectation that student success is truly a part of each department’s day-to-day responsibilities (and not simply a current administrative priority)?

The Academic Affairs Forum set out to uncover insights and practices that illustrate an answer to each of these questions, resulting in a set of clear responsibilities for faculty.

Overcoming the Silo Problem and Garnering Campus-Wide Support

1 **What should I expect of units, committees, and governance bodies?**

“We administrators have a lot of ideas about how to fix graduation rates, but shared governance means that most of the important decisions about the student experience happen outside of central administration.”

2 **What should I expect of individual faculty?**

“We talk about how everything we do supports students’ short- and long-term success, but that hasn’t changed anyone’s behavior when they get back to their desk.”

3 **How do I hardwire changes into institutional culture?**

“It’s hard to keep one particular issue top of mind when all of our faculty and departments have competing priorities. We’ve started a lot of initiatives over the years, but few lasted beyond the pilot phase.”

Six Roles for Faculty in Student Success

Part I of this report explores three roles that faculty play as *collective decision-makers* in improving student success.

In this section, we describe how academic units and committees can make better curricular decisions, calibrate academic policies to balance rigor with leniency, and understand their role within evolving academic advising models.

Part II discusses what individual faculty can do to help retain and graduate students.

While enriching the learning experience is at the core of their role, faculty members can also aid campus support staff by flagging early signs of student risk and mentoring students in need of early engagement.

In Part III, we present a set of incentive and accountability strategies that have been shown to encourage greater engagement among academic units in the six critical activities described above. It is not enough to generate awareness on campus—leaders must measure, monitor, and reward involvement among faculty to generate buy-in across their ranks.

Individual and Collective Responsibilities to Guide Institutional Change

Part 1

Collective Decision Making

1. **Remove Curricular Barriers to Completion**
   Considering student success in each stage of curricular decision-making

2. **Redesign Academic Policies**
   Garnering support for student-facing rule changes that promote persistence to degree

3. **Support Evolving Advising Models**
   Building buy-in for, confidence in, and collaboration with central and professional advising staff

Part 2

Individual Contribution

4. **Enhance the Learning Experience**
   Evaluating and scaling high-impact learning innovations across courses and disciplines

5. **Flag Signs of Student Risk**
   Equipping faculty with the right tools and techniques to maximize early warning systems

6. **Mentor Rising-Risk Student Groups**
   Targeting faculty engagement efforts toward students lacking a strong connection to campus

Part 3

Sustaining Momentum Through Structured Accountability and Incentives

Determining the right metrics, organizational structures, and incentives to encourage improvement among central administrators, deans, department chairs, and frontline faculty

EAB

Faculty as Collective Decision Makers

Engaging Academic Units, Committees, and Governance Bodies as Allies in Analyzing Barriers to Completion

PART 1

- Remove Curricular Barriers to Completion
- Redesign Academic Policies
- Support Evolving Advising Models

Where Curricular Planning Breaks Down

At most institutions, curricular decision-making occurs within two contexts: term-by-term departmental planning, and specialized committee work designed to produce curricular recommendations. Both of those processes have limitations and often result in decisions that actually harm student progression.

When faculty determine major requirements, elective course offerings, and class schedules, their decisions primarily reflect disciplinary concerns. Their well-intentioned desire to ensure the rigor and fidelity of programmatic curricula can come at the cost of access and degree progress, however, as is often the case with overly-restrictive admissions criteria or transfer credit articulation standards.

As a result, committees and taskforces are often formed by administrations hoping to overcome silo-based thinking. These groups typically engage in robust debate, but suffer from a lack of direction and authority. Inclusion and comprehensiveness comes at the cost of execution, leading to relatively weak recommendations that falter over time.

Both Unit-Level Incentives and Central Reform Mechanisms Fail to Fix Curricular Barriers

1 Departmental decisions ignore impact on progression

A+

Desire to ensure quality of students admitted to major

Overly strict requirements force students into last-minute major changes

Belief that 2-year institutions' programs lack required rigor

Transfers from community colleges have to retake classes or undergo slow, case-by-case audits

2 Committees and task forces falter over time

Desire to be inclusive and build broad consensus

Meetings focused more on discussion than decision; limited capacity for analysis or technical implementation support

Emphasis on open experimentation and small-scale pilots

New initiatives or changes never scale beyond initial enthusiasts; limited funding to sustain effort

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Arming Academic Units with Actionable Data

If detailed information about student outcomes is not available to academic units in a digestible format, they can hardly be blamed for failing to incorporate student success data into curricular decisions.

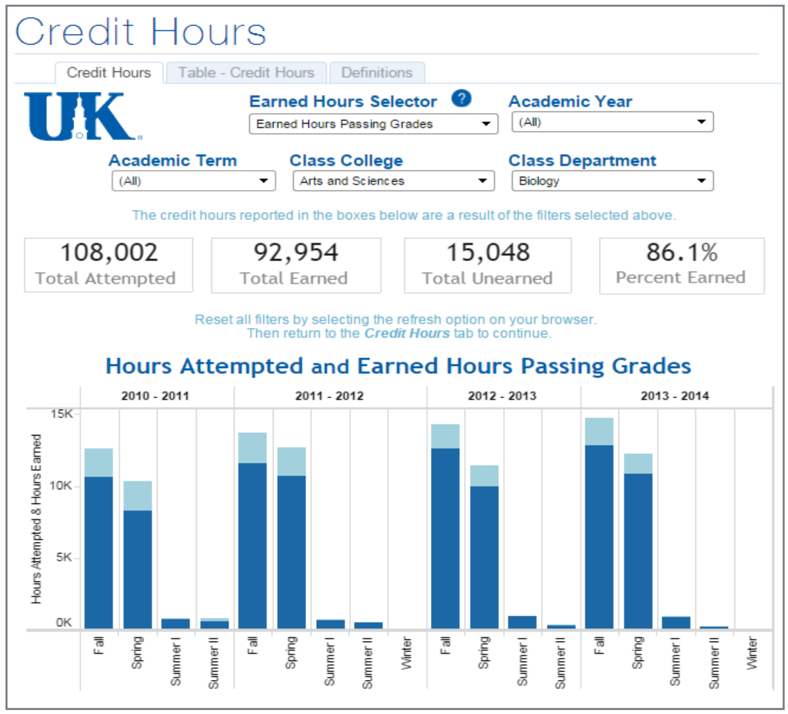
Too often, units rely on institutional research staff (who are often busy with internal and external reporting requirements) for one-off data requests. It may take months for faculty to receive the information they need to propose a new course, revise program requirements, or add supplementary instruction to a class, for example.

While the availability of data on its own is certainly no panacea for curricular obstacles, ensuring that faculty have easy access to critical information about enrollment is an important initial step. The University of Kentucky created a simple, interactive analysis platform on their institutional research web portal for this purpose, allowing any user to study student progression and success rates across terms, colleges, and departments.

Designated "super users" within each college curate unit-level dashboards to make it even easier for departmental leaders to actively consult these data on demand.

Embedding Analytics-Driven Analysis into Decentralized Decisions

The University of Kentucky's Easy-to-Use Student Data Platform



Analytics platform is publicly available, streamlining the data gathering and analysis process

Interactive charts allow users to sort academic data by department, college, class year, and demographics

Dedicated "super users" from each college meet biweekly to discuss and curate unit-level dashboards

Source: University of Kentucky Institutional Research & Advanced Analytics (http://www.uky.edu/iraa/), EAB interviews and analysis.

Guardrails on Curricular Changes

Mere access to data, without the necessary incentives or processes in place, rarely changes behavior.

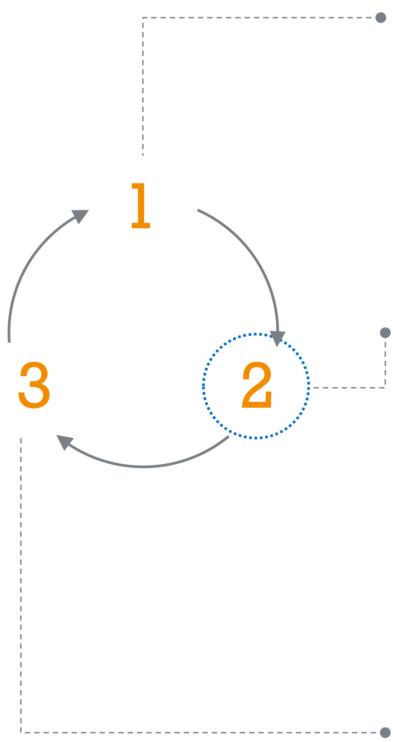
Some institutions have found success in building a role within the central administration to independently evaluate changes to curricula or academic policies. In addition to encouraging units to conduct their own analyses and providing them with the necessary information, academic leaders should check the underlying assumptions behind proposed changes before allowing them to proceed toward approval.

At Virginia Commonwealth University, this role is played by the Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management and his staff, who provide historical enrollment data (for example, retention and graduation rates of particular student segments by major), and project the impact that new rules or curricular reforms might have on recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation.

While faculty maintain ultimate authority over the curriculum, each decision is now informed by rigorous analysis and made with the entire institution in mind, rather than one or two academic units.

Strategic Enrollment Management Analyses Check Faculty Assumptions

VCU
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY



Units propose curricular changes

- Encouraged to conduct self-analysis of progression impact and strategic alignment, but often lack resources or expertise to rigorously vet proposals

Enrollment Manager analyzes claims and simulates impact of changes

- Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management runs longitudinal analyses to test assumptions
- No veto power, but strong buy-in from provost and dean’s council to influence decisions

Curriculum committee and deans view final report

- Recommendations include analyses conducted by enrollment management office
- Traditional approval process keeps faculty in control of curriculum

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

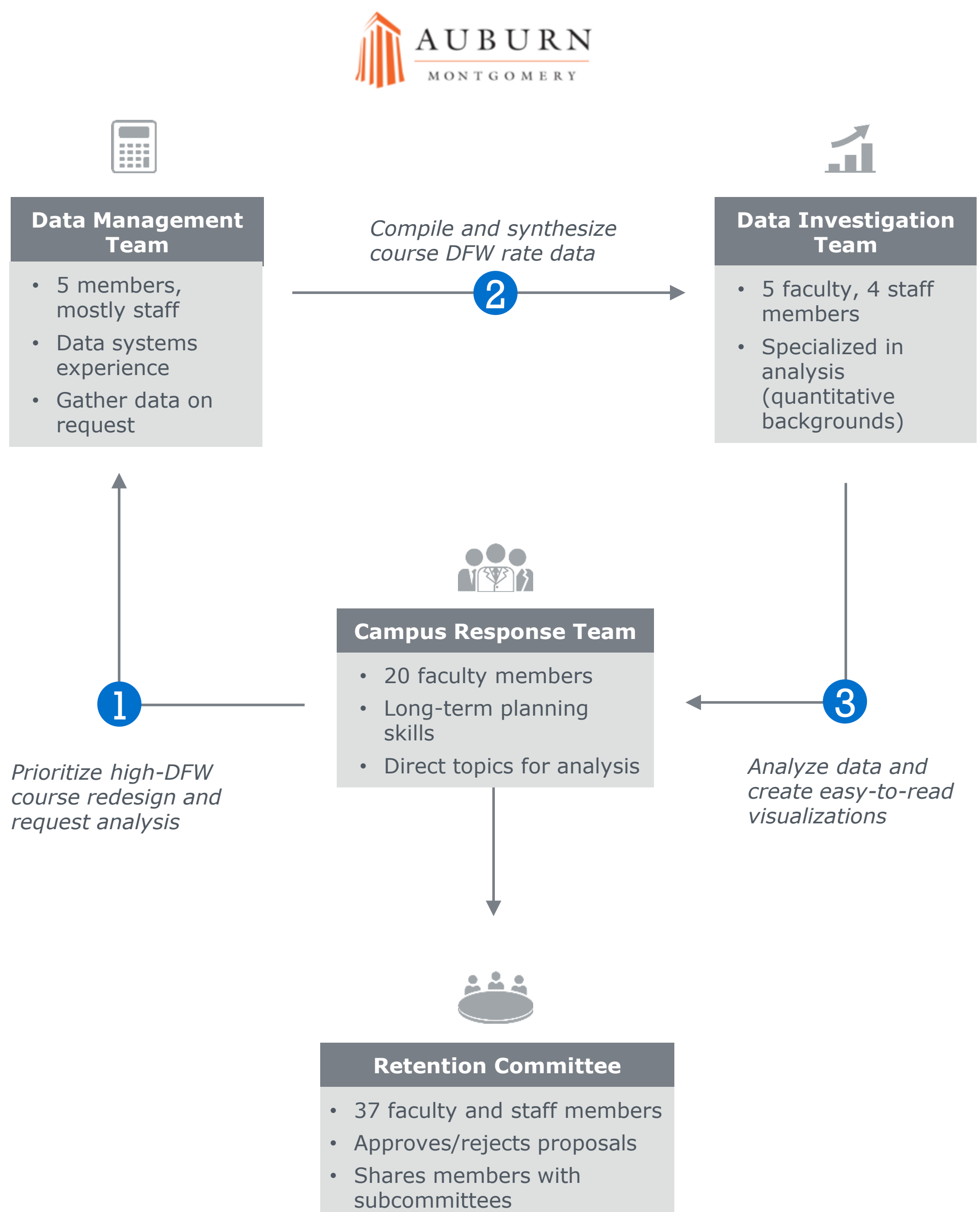
Matching Talent and Task

Creating a high-functioning central student success committee or taskforce can drive faster and more impactful change across campus than the previously-discussed checks on decentralized curricular decision-making. But too often, these groups devolve into forums for debate, rather than action.

Auburn University at Montgomery has implemented a creative solution to this problem by distributing the work of their 37-member retention committee among task-based teams—a "Campus Response" team focused on setting the agenda and making substantive recommendations, a "Data Management" team focused on gathering and cleaning relevant data for analysis, and a "Data Investigation" team focused on interpreting that data.

By placing faculty who are both interested in and qualified for their designed tasks on these teams, this committee has been able to make significant progress in generating data-driven solutions to the campus's biggest curricular bottlenecks, from high-failure "gatekeeper" courses to achievement gaps between traditional and non-traditional students. Most importantly, it places faculty in direct ownership over the investigation of these barriers and over their resolution.

Strategically Deployed Faculty Members Accelerate Campus Consensus on Curricular Change



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Project Management Framework Guides Reform

Seed funding initiatives can augment or even supplant the work of central student success committees when conducted effectively, but small-scale pilots led by faculty members rarely drive institution-wide change. Pilots often lack three key ingredients: a detailed work plan, support for technical and logistical needs, and sufficient capital from the administration to grow into permanence.

Portland State University's "Provost's Challenge" initiative allocated $3 million across 24 faculty- and staff-led projects, beginning in 2013, carefully addressing each of these potential limitations along the way. Using a rigorous project management structure with dedicated staff support, and insisting that each funded project demonstrate full-scale implementation by an 18-month deadline, Portland State's leadership was able to complete an astonishing number of curricular, technological, and administrative reforms over a short period of time.

Like Auburn University at Montgomery's task-based teams, this approach places faculty at the center of each idea and its implementation, ensuring that no change is perceived as a top-down mandate.

Ensuring Implementation of Scalable Innovations

Portland State University

Project Management Plan Outlines Roles

Taskforces designate team leads and assign tasks to members

- Working plans assign team lead, executive sponsor, and liaison roles
- Teams submit budget and technology needs
- Ongoing progress reports

Logistical Support

University staff support faculty with timelines, budgets, and other documentation tasks

- Dedicated project managers direct meetings and coordinate non-curricular project needs
- Role can be played by existing support staff or technical specialists

No Pilot Programs

Required full-scale implementation and sustainability plans

- Funded projects must be fully implemented by end of pre-determined timeframe
- Sustainability plan includes ongoing funding and management needs

Examples of Funded Projects

Automated Major Changes

- Problem: 90-credit major declaration policy not enforced
- Built technical solution for students to submit major and view curriculum information
- Results: 3,735 majors changed, 15,855 confirmed

Online Academic and Career Advising Modules

- Problem: limited student access to advising materials
- Created multimedia, LMS-integrated student guides for self-advising and career pathing
- Results: guides fully usable by end of project term

Source: Portland State University, "Provost's Challenge" (https://www.pdx.edu/oai/provosts-challenge); EAB interviews and analysis.

Faculty Influence Extends Beyond the Curriculum

Perhaps the most overlooked role of faculty relevant to student success is their responsibility for determining the rules and regulations that govern student enrollment.

Nearly every academic policy, no matter how minor, can have an impact on student success. But most are determined independently, sometimes arbitrarily, and can even pose serious challenges for students. Dozens of complex registration hold policies, for example, can needlessly discourage students from re-enrolling, while overly lenient course repeat policies might lead some students to proceed too far down the wrong path.

On the right, we illustrate a number of policy reforms previously discussed in Academic Affairs Forum research—each demonstrating the impact a relatively minor policy shift can have on student success.

To help members rethink and revise their own academic policies to encourage greater alignment with their student success goals, we have created an Academic Policy Audit, which can be found at the end of this report. The diagnostic exercise on the following two pages is intended to facilitate the identification of too-lenient or too-strict policies, each of which is explained further in the appendix.

Policy Decisions Have Direct and Indirect Effects on Student Progression

Progression-Informed Policy Reforms

Course Planning Departments plan sections one term at a time, limiting long-term planning	→	**Multi-term Registration** Annual course planning period enables full-year course registration for students • *3% retention gain at Cleveland State University*
Withdrawal Process Easy *Yes/No* prompt for course or institutional withdrawal leads to poor student decisions	→	**Withdrawal Surveys** Online prompts show students consequences of withdrawal and campus resources • *40% of students starting survey retained at Penn State University[1]*
Registration Holds Small, unpaid bursar fees lead to hundreds of stop-outs after registration hold	→	**Emergency Grants** Students missing fee payments proactively counseled and assisted in exceptional cases • *5-8% retention gain at Xavier University*
Enrollment Status Many students take light course loads without anticipating impact on time-to-degree	→	**Encourage Full Course Load** Students required to take at least 30 credits per year or submit advisor waiver • *Higher course loads led to higher GPAs and grad rates at University of Hawaii*
Co-curricular Requirements Students often wait until their final term to fulfill institutional graduation requirements, delaying graduation	→	**Front Load Complex Requirements** Students at University of Southern California required to complete a three-term foreign language requirement within their first 60 credit hours

1) Estimate based on 2012 data.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Academic Policy Diagnostic

Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

This resource, organized by category, will help you determine where your institution’s academic rules, regulations, and processes might create unnecessary obstacles for students. **Detailed descriptions of each policy and relevant resources are included at the listed page number**.

A small committee should review this list and evaluate the institution’s approach to each policy according to its relative leniency. In order to represent all relevant areas of academic policy and planning at a high level of organizational structure, the ideal academic policy audit committee should include the Provost, the Registrar, the head of Undergraduate Studies, and representatives from student government and the faculty senate.

Policy	Too Lenient	Best Practice	Too Strict	Page
Degree Planning				
Degree Plan Requirements	Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning	Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor	Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan	60
Degree Milestones	Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses	Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting	Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course	62
Experiential Education Requirements	Do not require experiential learning activities	Integrate experiential learning into credit-bearing courses	Require non-credit-bearing experiential learning activities	64
Transfer Credit Articulation	Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit	Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation	Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis	66
Accelerating Degree Progress				
Remedial Education	Allow students to complete remedial coursework any time in the first two years	Enroll students with remedial needs in for-credit summer courses before the first year	Require students to complete remediation before matriculating	68
Course Load	Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term	Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits	Require all students to take 15 credits per term to be considered full-time	70
Major Declaration	Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution	Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree	Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation	72
Excess Credit Accumulation	Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance	Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status	Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements	74

Academic Policy Diagnostic (cont.)

Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

Too Lenient		Best Practice		Too Strict	
Registration and Course Scheduling					
Bursar Holds					76
Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount	☐	Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register	☐	Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid	☐
Multi-term Registration					78
Allow students to register for only one academic term at a time, excluding intersession	☐	Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once	☐	Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans	☐
Course Wait Lists					80
Create a new section any time a course hits 100% fill rate to accommodate demand	☐	Override registration caps for some students until wait list reaches enrollment minimum	☐	Do not allow students to register for courses after courses reach capacity	☐
Preventing Unnecessary Withdrawals					
Early Academic Alerts					82
Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades	☐	Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe	☐	Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline	☐
Course Repeats					84
Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions	☐	Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat	☐	Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements	☐
Course and Institutional Withdrawal					86
Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction	☐	Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal	☐	Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal	☐
Academic Probation and Dismissal					88
Allow students to remain on probation indefinitely, regardless of improvement	☐	Require students on probation to reverse GPA trend to continue at the institution	☐	Dismiss students if they fail to improve academic standing after one probationary term	☐
Student Messaging and Outreach					
Student Communications					90
Allow faculty and staff to communicate with all students as frequently as desired	☐	Centrally coordinate and schedule messages to large numbers of students	☐	Require all student communications to come from one central office	☐
Student Aid Renewal					92
Do not require students to refile financial aid forms after the first year	☐	Send a series of escalating "nudges" reminding students to refile financial aid forms	☐	Use registration holds to require students to refile financial aid forms	☐
Non-registered Students					94
Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term	☐	Call students who fail to register before the deadline for unexplained reasons	☐	Automatically register students for courses using a prescriptive degree plan	☐

Unbundling the Advising Process

The last consequential role of academic units in student success involves the adoption of new, retention-focused advising models.

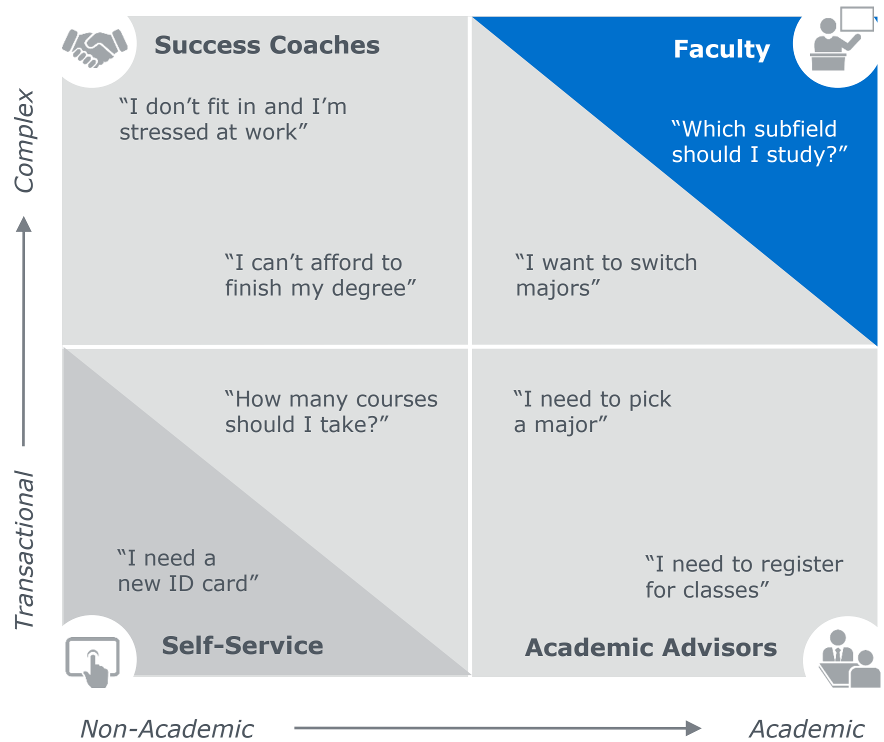
In recent years, we have witnessed a tremendous evolution within the academic advising community—from a focus on registration to a broad engagement with student success and proactive intervention. This expansion has necessitated a number of new roles on campus, all designed to get students the help they need at the point they need it.

The optimal advising "model" is designed around students' questions, which vary from transactional to complex, on one hand, and from non-academic to highly-academic on the other.

Transactional, non-academic questions are best supported through easy-to-use self-service tools. Complex academic questions are the clear realm of faculty—where they are uniquely positioned for and most likely to embrace supporting students.

The "gray area" between these two poles, however, is ripe for innovation. Professional advisors and "success coach" roles focused on holistic support are now common among progressive institutions making real progress on student retention and completion.

Dozens of Discrete Student Problems Require Variety of Differentiated Roles on Campus



"The key to our shift to professional advising within the colleges has been to frame their role as entirely different from faculty mentoring. Faculty should really be sitting down with students and having deeper conversations about their discipline, not worrying about registration, financial aid, or scheduling."

Provost, Large Public University

For more on self-service support…

See *Guiding Student Choice to Promote Persistence*, our 2015 report on how one-stop service portals, mobile apps, and degree planning tools can equip student to make better decisions without requiring advisor intervention.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Separation Anxiety

Faculty often resist significant changes to advising, and in particular, the addition of non-faculty professional advising staff, for a number of understandable reasons.

First, they often have limited contact with new advising staff members, and therefore have limited trust in their abilities or advice.

Second, they worry that the addition of new advising staff will add a new layer of procedural bureaucracy, requiring more, rather than less, of their time and effort.

Third, they worry about ceding their responsibility for curricular advice to outsiders who may not have the experience or disciplinary context to steer students in the right direction.

And fourth, they are concerned that shifting advising efforts from departments to colleges or a central office will harm administrative support within their units—as decentralized advising staff are often performing a wide variety of non-advising support roles.

Quality and Resource Concerns Preventing Institutions from Reorganizing Advising

Trust and Familiarity

"This will distance me from my students and their choices"

- Limited training and faculty-staff interaction give faculty little confidence in advisors

Efficient Communication

"This will add to, not relieve, my administrative workload."

- New advising staff will require ongoing development, management, and more meetings

Confidence in Advice

"Students will be led astray by non-departmental staff"

- Losing control over academic guidance could lead to bad curricular choices by students

Operational Resources

"Our advising staff are critical to the function of our unit"

- Distributed support staff often play a number of important roles, making centralization difficult

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Trust Through Training

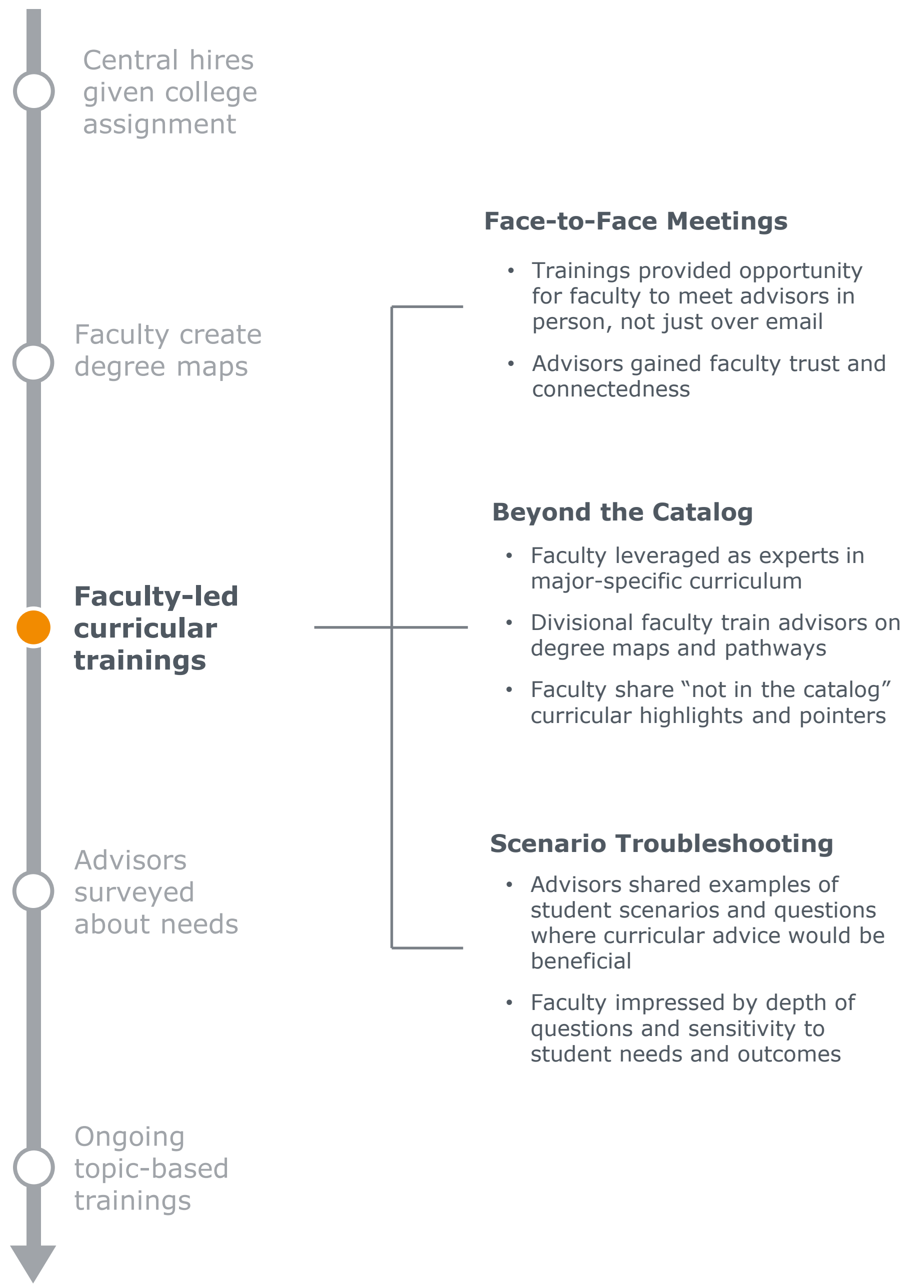
When Mercy College moved from a decentralized approach to advising to a new, central advising organization staffed by dozens of professional "student mentors" (each managing a caseload of students across their academic careers), they took care to ensure the faculty had a clear and regular forum through which to engage with new hires.

After creating degree maps for their programs, faculty train centrally-hired but college-deployed advising staff through a series of face-to-face meetings, discussing program requirements, frequently-asked questions, and any additional contextual items that they feel advisors should be familiar with.

Following the trainings, advisors submit any questions through a post-training survey, which informs ongoing mini-trainings with faculty that occur throughout the academic year.

The leadership at Mercy College noted that faculty perception of the new advising model changed dramatically after these trainings occurred. Offering faculty a chance to meet the mentors and formally hand off curricular knowledge helped ease their mind around the level of service that the new advisors would be able to provide students.

Easing Skepticism by Creating a Formal Mechanism for Faculty Influence



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Creating a Career Path

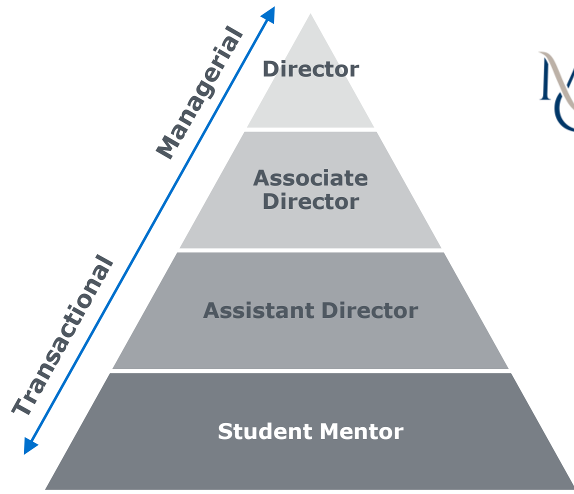
The best way to mitigate concerns about the quality of professional advising is to recruit and retain high-performing advising staff. At most institutions, the lack of a viable career ladder in distributed professional advising organizations has severely limited their ability to do so.

In conjunction with their transition to a centralized professional advising model, Mercy College created a four-tier career ladder for student mentors, who could be promoted to Assistant Director, Associate Director, and Director within their college advising center units. Mentors are evaluated annually, based on student performance, engagement, collaboration with faculty members, professional development, and financial aid counseling.

This combination of rigorous assessment (focused on critical *outcomes*, not just processes or qualitative input) and a viable upward trajectory to management has enabled Mercy to build an incredibly strong team of advisors over time. Faculty rest easy knowing that students are in good hands, and can focus their efforts on equipping full-time advisors with the most up-to-date curricular information and helping students through mentorship, undergraduate research, and supplementary instruction.

Management Opportunities Help to Recruit and Retain High-performing Advising Staff, Easing Faculty Burden

Four-step promotion path places advisors in increasingly managerial roles



Annual evaluations track advisor performance on concrete objectives

Competency	Performance Metrics
Student Engagement	Involvement data, satisfaction survey feedback
Mentoring Engagement	Meetings with mentees, share of students with academic plans on file
Faculty Engagement	Number of early alert interventions, number of students attending tutoring or other services
Career Development	Share of students completing self-assessments, internships, ePortfolios
College Affordability	Aid status, FAFSA forms completed
Student Success	**Persistence to degree by cohort, total earned credits**

1. Promise of upward career mobility attracts better-quality candidates
2. Less staff turnover and greater employee engagement
3. Metric-based evaluation and promotion process incentivizes high performance

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

The Virtues of Middle Management

Managerial roles within a tiered advising organization are critical in mediating between the central administration, academic units, and frontline academic advisors.

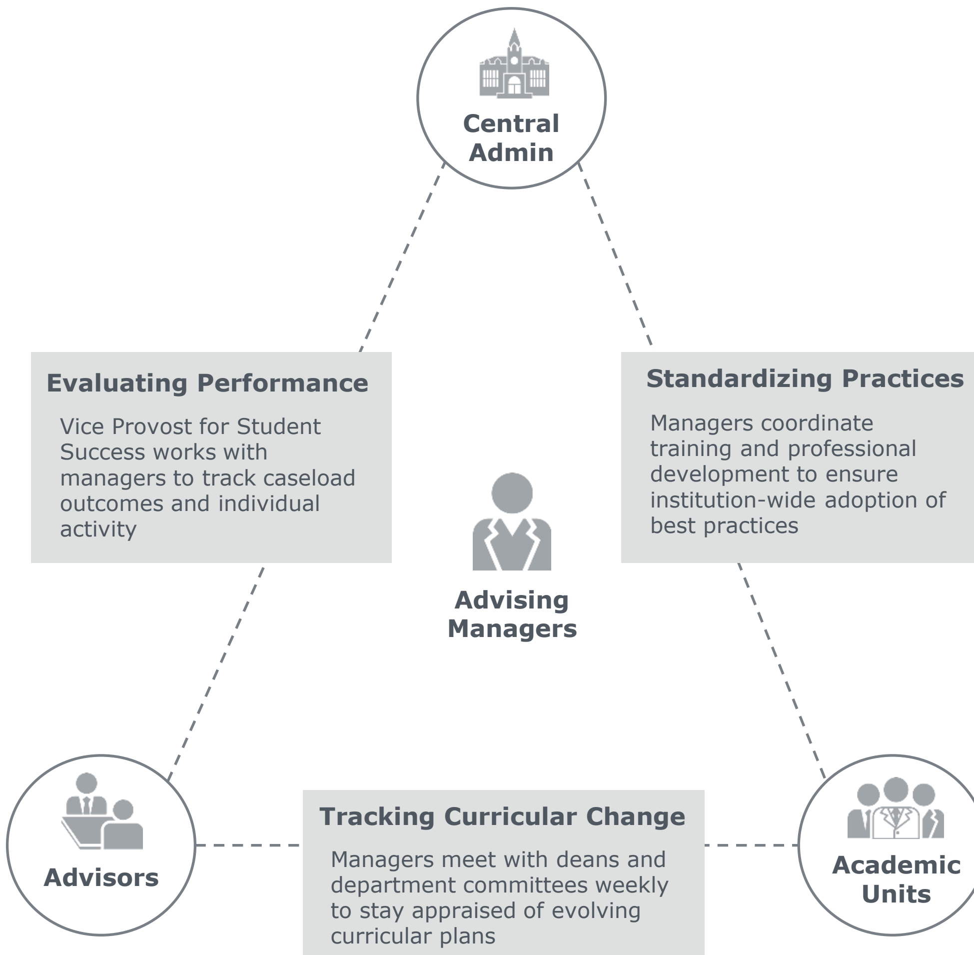
At Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), each college has an advising center that is overseen by an advising manager. Advising managers spend half of their time working with students and the other half aligning strategy between the different stakeholders on campus.

These advising managers are the primary conduit through which the central administration can inflect and standardize advising policies across academic units. They also serve as liaisons to the departments within their college, giving the chairs and faculty leaders one senior contact to update on new requirements or programs and protecting faculty from having to micromanage a growing advising staff.

Finally, these positions offer the administration a way to assess and improve the performance of advisors. When MTSU's Vice Provost for Student Success notices poorly performing student caseloads or a lack of appointments and outreach, the advising managers assist with professional development and trainings to improve advisor performance.

Manager/Liaison Model Balances Central Coordination with Disciplinary Specialization

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Distributed Advisors Do More Than Just Advise

The final concern often shared among faculty regarding centralized advising structures relates to resources. Departmental advisors often perform a wide variety of "side of desk" tasks, from event planning and management to administrative support and logistics. Some may even view student advising itself as "side of desk."

Reclaiming departmental budget lines for college- or centrally-owned advising staff can therefore generate discord among academic units relying on existing staff for these critical administrative functions.

Units Hesitant to Lose "Jack of All Trades" Support Staff

Academic Advisor
College of Engineering

- Assist students with degree plans
- Reach out to off-track students
- Refer students to other offices
- Respond to in-classroom early alerts
- Assist students with career planning
- Answer financial aid questions
- Enter student registration info into form

Academic Advising

Tasks performed by advisors directly impact student retention and graduation in the college

Generalist Tasks

Centralization of advising reporting lines/funding would leave academic unit without anyone responsible

- Manage meeting schedules and sign-ups
- Answer office phone during work hours
- Assist with college first-year orientation events
- Plan yearly faculty retreat

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Compensating Units for Unique Staffing Needs

The best way to overcome resource constraints associated with broad, widely varying advisor responsibilities is to perform a unit-by-unit task inventory.

When the New School shifted their academic advising model to a centrally-owned (but college-deployed) structure, academic affairs staff met with each college to inventory the tasks that distributed advisors were performing.

Those tasks tended to fall into four categories. First, advisors provided services like financial aid counseling and career planning, which duplicated existing shared services on campus that the colleges were not aware of.

Second, advisors were performing outdated tasks that could be automated or largely eliminated through software.

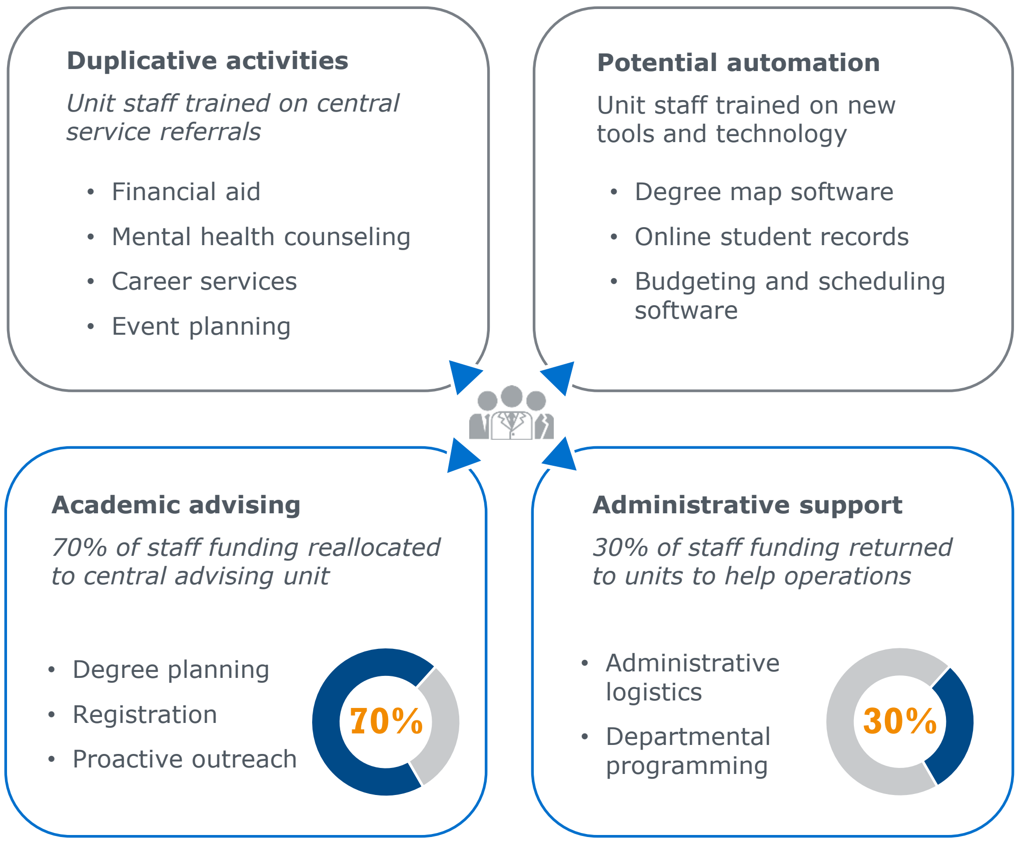
Third, academic advising activity could be transitioned effectively to central advisors.

Fourth, units were compensated for unique, unit-specific administrative needs that could not be met more effectively through another method.

As a result, the New School was able to transition to a more accountable advising model while equipping each college and department with the support they needed to function effectively.

Advisor Task Inventory Reveals Areas for Shared Service Streamlining

THE NEW SCHOOL



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Faculty as Individual Contributors

Helping Faculty Members to Reach, Teach, and Support the Students Who Need Them Most

PART 2

- Enhance the Learning Experience
- Flag Signs of Student Risk
- Mentor Rising-Risk Student Groups

A Profusion of Pedagogical Advances

In clarifying how individual faculty members can support their institution's student success goals, the first important activity to consider is teaching. The classroom comprises the biggest opportunity for faculty to impact, inspire, and engage students.

Critics of higher education often lament a perceived lack of innovation in the classroom, leading, they say, to stagnant student learning outcomes, outdated curricula, and ultimately poor completion rates.

There is no shortage of pedagogical innovation across the sector, however. From public research universities to private baccalaureate colleges, we have identified groundbreaking approaches to instruction that promise tremendous results.

Advances in active learning, for example, have illustrated dozens of alternatives to the traditional lecture that can dramatically improve outcomes in introductory STEM courses.

Faculty in a variety of disciplines have mapped concrete skills and outcomes to syllabi, helping their departments systematically measure and improve the learning experience over time.

Institutions Across Segments Experimenting with Curriculum and Delivery

Public 4-Year

- University of Missouri System: Accelerated Degree Pathways
- UC DAVIS: iAMSTEM Active Learning Redesign
- ASU: Adaptive Learning in First-Year Math
- OSU: Alternative Classroom Designs

Private 4-Year

- Southern New Hampshire University: Competency-Based Education
- MIT: Course Modularization
- Antioch University: Prior Learning Assessment
- The University of Akron: Online First-Year Gen Ed Courses

Canadian 4-Year

- R: Entrepreneurship Incubators
- Memorial University: Competency-Focused Syllabi
- University of Toronto: Teaching-Stream Faculty Rank
- uOttawa: Active Learning Lecture Software

Public 2-Year

- SBCTC: Open Course Library
- Sinclair Community College: Predictive Academic Analytics
- Austin Community College: Employer Curriculum Collaborations
- Chattanooga State Community College: Student-Centered Developmental Math

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Scaling Learning Innovations

The challenge for college and university leaders is not, then, in creating innovation from scratch; instead, they must focus on identifying innovative faculty members, supporting and rewarding their efforts, encouraging others to emulate their practices, and channeling those practices toward institutional priorities—with student retention and completion at the forefront.

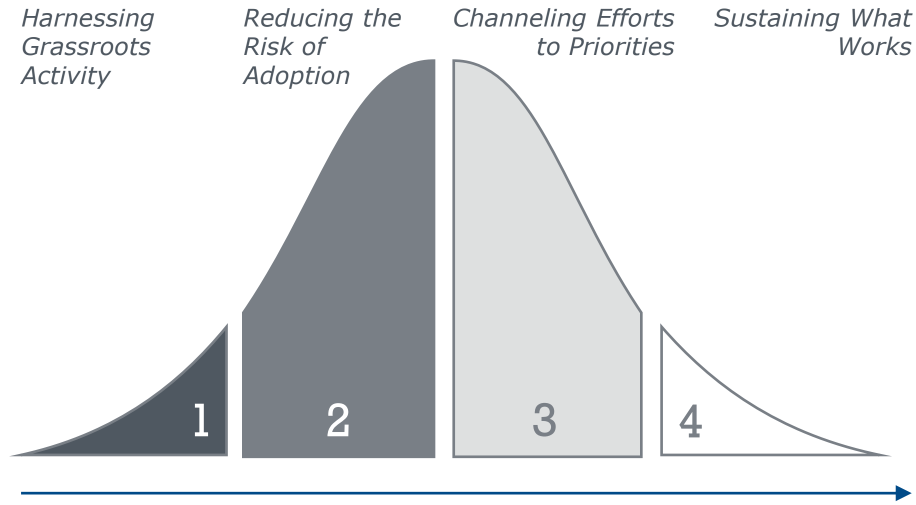
Scaling Learning Innovations, a 2016 Academic Affairs Forum study, describes how progressive institutions are addressing these challenges.

The study includes best practices in overcoming what has been called "the perpetual pilot problem"—the tendency for institutions to invest heavily in small, singular experiments, but ultimately fail to inflect the larger pedagogical culture on campus. Most campuses suffer not only from this problem, but from an under-resourced and under-staffed center for teaching and learning as well; these shared service units are often viewed as punitive in nature, rather than as safe spaces for experimentation or as incubators of innovation.

Download or order *Scaling Learning Innovations* at eab.com to learn more about how to expand the ranks of great instructors on your campus.

From Early Adopters to Campus-Wide

The Learning Innovations Adoption Curve



Surfacing and Supporting Innovators

- Identify innovative faculty
- Reduce risk of investment

Lowering Opportunity Costs

- Demonstrate effectiveness of alternative pedagogies
- Increase confidence in technology
- Hardwire social rewards

Aligning with Institutional Initiatives

- Prioritize complementary room and facility assignments
- Provide effective departmental incentives for course redesigns

Prioritizing Innovation in the Academy

- Reconsider the role of innovation in promotion and tenure
- Document learning innovations and explore new instruction-focused roles

For more on learning innovation…

See *Scaling Learning Innovations*, our 2016 report on leveraging entrepreneurial faculty and instructional design staff to reward and expand great teaching at your institution.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Don’t Let Classroom Contact Go to Waste

Just as classroom interaction provides a context for learning, it also provides an occasion for faculty to identify and support students at risk of failure or disengagement.

As important as academic advising is to student success, students might spend only 1 or 2 hours per term with their designated advisor. In contrast, a student taking a full course load might spend 225 hours with faculty in the classroom over the course of a term.

Attendance and early grades are both powerful predictors of student attrition risk and can be gathered within the first few months of class. Mississippi State University (MSU) found that students who miss three or more sessions of a given class have a first-term GPA that is 1.6 points lower than those without attendance problems. These students are not just less academically prepared—their internal data showed that both groups had similar standardized test scores.

Early or midterm grades are also important predictors of longer-term success, across a variety of disciplines.

As a result, the majority of postsecondary institutions have invested in early warning systems, designed to help faculty to “flag” signs of student risk in the classroom and better target support services to those in need.

Leverage Faculty-Student Interactions to Aid Risk Identification and Engagement Strategy

Average first semester student hours spent…

1

…in an advising office

225

…in a classroom, assuming full course load

Powerful predictive metrics right under our noses

1.6

First-year GPA gap between students with and without attendance problems

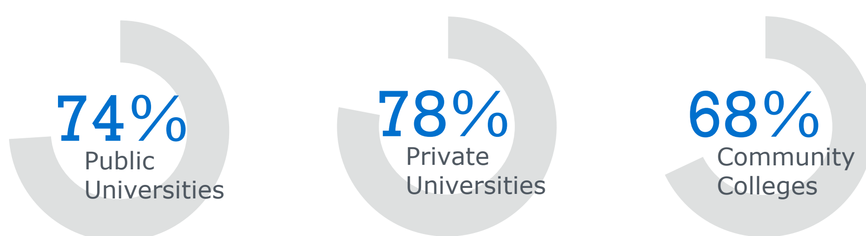
(*Mississippi State University, 2013*)

In all cases analyzed, midterm and first-exam grades strongly predicted final grades … Midterm and final grades were also strongly correlated in a variety of other academic disciplines at the liberal arts college, including the humanities, the social sciences, and the fine arts.”

James Barron & Philip Jensen

Journal of College Science Teaching (2014)

In response, extensive deployment of early warning systems in higher education



Source: Mississippi State University – Pathfinders Program; James Barron and Philip Jensen, “Midterm and First-Exam Grades Predict Final Grades in Biology Courses,” *Journal of College Science* Teaching (Nov/Dec 2014); “What Works in Student Retention,” Habley et al. (2010); EAB interviews and analysis.

Getting from Acceptance to Buy-In

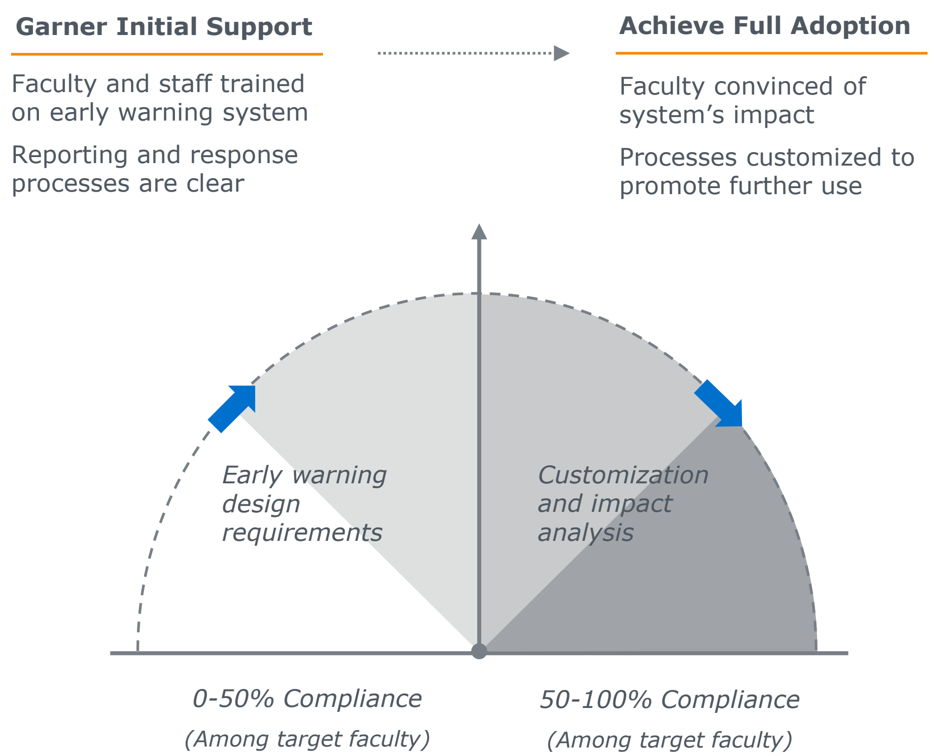
Recalling an observation made earlier in this report, the *existence* and even ubiquity of early warning systems in higher education does not mean that they have been *effective* in preventing attrition.

Many institutions fail to garner initial support from faculty at the outset, typically because of poor user design, a lack of communication and training, and unclear protocols for referring students to services.

Still others reach a small number of willing instructors, but fail to achieve enough adoption to meaningfully improve student outcomes. These institutions have made strides in making their grade, attendance, and risk reporting systems user-friendly, but have failed to allow for sufficient customization among faculty or to convince the faculty of the critical link between early intervention and long-term success at the institution.

The following practices can dramatically improve early warning system adoption by addressing the shortcomings listed above.

System Design Only Part of the Challenge



"Right now, faculty do not clearly see the correlation between what happens to a student in their classroom and what happens to that same student at the institution. That is a gap we have to fix."

Dean, Large Public University

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Allay Initial Concerns by Streamlining System

Building momentum during the early development and deployment of an early warning system requires attention to the basic design principles featured on the right.

The system should be simple—giving faculty a single referral point for any student concern (not a list of a dozen support offices and contacts to memorize), ensuring that teaching assistants and contingent faculty are trained on its use, and deployed primarily in high-risk courses taken by first-year students.

Alerts should also be handled in a way that is sensitive to both student and faculty concerns about privacy, tone, and intervention triggers.

The most effective systems limit full access to alert records, but encourage broad utilization of the flag system. Student support staff and advisors should also ensure that faculty are notified both of an alert's receipt, and of the resulting action taken.

In *Hardwiring Student Success*, our 2009 study on retention and completion, we explore these foundational principles in more depth in *Part I: Building the Retention Early Warning System.*

Early Alert Processes Should Be Simple, Strategic, and Sensitive to Student and Faculty Concerns

Making It Simple

Single Referral

- Faculty given option to suggest specific response, but able to send all alerts to single office

Target High-Risk Courses and Students

- Focus compliance efforts at highest-impact populations

All-Inclusive

- Single system for logging academic, attendance, and behavioral alerts

Includes Assistants

- Train graduate and teaching assistants to ensure coverage of introductory course sections

Addressing Faculty Concerns

Student Privacy

- Faculty, advisors, RAs, and support staff able to submit alerts, but full access limited

Positive Messaging

- Students encouraged to take clear action steps, rather than simply alerted of risk

Follow-up

- Faculty informed of alert receipt, as well as progress and resolution of cases

Flexible Faculty Role

- Faculty able to decide whether and how to get involved with student issues

For more on early warning system design…

See *Hardwiring Student Success*, which outlines how California State University – Northridge developed a streamlined, effective early warning system to flag students with attendance and performance problems.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Allow for Flexible Application

To move beyond the initial deployment of an early warning system and build broader faculty engagement, consider allowing for flexibility in its application.

Student success staff at West Virginia University (WVU) found that the ability to customize aspects of their alert process was central to garnering faculty buy-in.

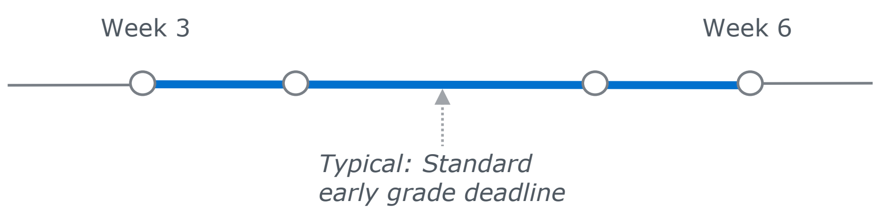
First, rather than insisting on one particular week during the term to collect midterm or early exam grades, WVU allows each instructor to determine when, between weeks three and six, to report whether students are at risk for failure.

Second, rather than having one grade threshold by which to assess all student risk, WVU allows faculty to determine what constitutes "on track" or "off track" for their students. This approach avoids a lengthy debate about whether a "C," for example, is cause for alarm on each particular assessment in each specific course.

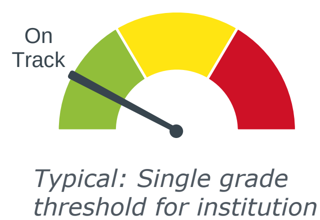
Finally, faculty can select and rank the kinds of resources or referrals they think are appropriate for a given student. Faculty can recommend tutoring, supplemental instruction, additional office hours, or leave the decision up to the early warning office, for example.

Instructor-Specific Time Window and Grade Scale Improve Adoption

Faculty asked to determine best early assessment point



Faculty determine assessment that constitutes "on track"



Faculty able to choose and prioritize resources sent to students

1. Office hours
2. Supplementary instruction
3. Tutoring center
4. Departmental resource

– *Typical: Early warning office dictates response*

Source: West Virginia University Early Alert Program; EAB interviews and analysis.

Illustrating Impact

Understandably, faculty members often view these systems as yet another reporting process they're meant to *comply* with, as opposed to a critical tool that can make the difference in whether a student completes their degree or drops out of college.

To change that perception, messaging about early alerts should come from the provost or other academic leaders that faculty feel accountable to rather than a central student success office or staff member. It is no surprise that the institutions enjoying the highest participation rates among faculty tend to send introductory and reminder notices about the systems through the provost. Department chairs and deans then follow up with individual instructors that have not reported early academic alerts or midterm grades.

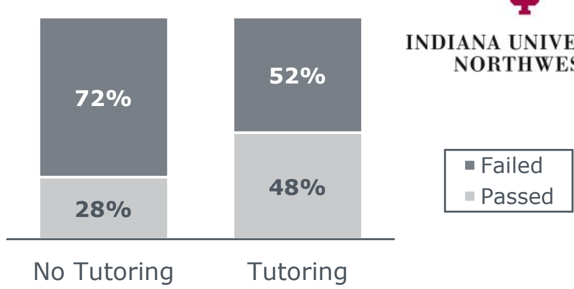
The administration should also evaluate and report on their early warning system's impact. For example, Indiana University Northwest publishes data on how students who are flagged and then use academic support services perform, compared to those who are not flagged or are flagged and fail to use the resources. Revealing the impact of these interventions helps to overcome faculty skepticism.

Alerts Serve to Help Students Succeed, Not to Punish Bad Teaching

1. **Promotion and compliance messaging should come from academic leaders**
   - Provost reminds faculty each term of relationship between early risk indicators and attrition
   - Department chairs and deans contact faculty who fail to submit necessary alerts (not central support office or academic advisors)

2. **Demonstrate increased utilization of support services and effect on grades, retention**

INDIANA UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST



More Than Compliance at Stake

"If instructors and staff are not aware of how the systems work or why they are structured the way they are, and if the only messages they receive about it are regarding participation, a significant opportunity for campus-wide discussions about retention and student success has been missed."

"Early Alert Project Action Team: Final Report"

Western Michigan University (2014)

Source: "The Effectiveness of Early Alert (FLAGs) on Math Tutoring, Grades, and Student Success," Indiana University Northwest; EAB interviews and analysis.

Early Neglect Can Lead to Late Attrition

Most universities have spent decades investing in support resources for both their highest- and lowest-risk students. So called "high flyer programming," including undergraduate research opportunities, honors colleges, study abroad, and living-learning communities is often sought out by high-performing students. Students with common risk signs (first generation, low test scores, remediation needs, etc.) are often given extra resources as well.

The challenge, as Vince Tinto explains on the right, is to engage students traditionally left out of these programs.

While students in the middle of the preparedness spectrum might not show obvious signs of risk in their first term or two, they often encounter problems later in their academic career—when faculty are uniquely positioned to help. But without experience or established relationships with faculty, these students might not be willing to reach out for the assistance they require.

Faculty leaders at the University of Colorado, Boulder (CU Boulder) set out to tackle this issue, hoping to help unengaged students build greater confidence and academic direction in the first year.

Support Services and Enrichment Activities Focused Primarily on Most and Least at Risk

"Involvement, or what is increasingly being referred to as engagement, matters and it matters most during the critical first year of college. What is less clear is… how to make it happen in different settings and for differing students in ways that enhance retention and graduation."

Vincent Tinto

Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next?

High Flyer Programming

- Living and learning communities
- Undergraduate research
- Study abroad
- Internship and field experiences
- Independent study
- Honors college

The Engagement Gap

Disengaged students persist to upper division but lack faculty connection needed to complete

31%

Of students with a first-year GPA between 2.0 and 3.0 drop out between their second and sixth year[1]

High-Risk Support

- TRIO student support services
- Intensive coaching programs
- Tutoring and supplemental instruction
- Academic skills workshops
- Math workgroups

"We have a ton of programming aimed at both the top 10 percent and the bottom 10 percent of our incoming class. Unfortunately, we hadn't done as much for all the students in the middle."

Paul Chinowsky, Associate Vice Provost for Student Success
University of Colorado - Boulder

1) EAB analysis of 740,000 students at 73 public and private universities in the US (2014 "Murky Middle Project," Student Success Collaborative).

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Where Faculty Can Help

The CU Boulder Faculty Assembly strategically re-targeted its faculty-student mentoring program with over 100 participating faculty members to reach students in the "engagement gap."

About 50% of first-year students at the institution live in a living-learning community called a Residential Academic Program (RAP), which are designed to convene students around a common academic theme with faculty guidance. Assembly leaders decided to focus mentoring activities on the other 50 percent of first-year students, proactively reaching out during the summer and asking the residential advisors in their dormitories to refer students to the mentoring program during their first few weeks.

The program then matches students with faculty mentors based on a detailed sign-up form that includes students' interests, major plans, and risk indicators (such as intent to work full-time or off-campus).

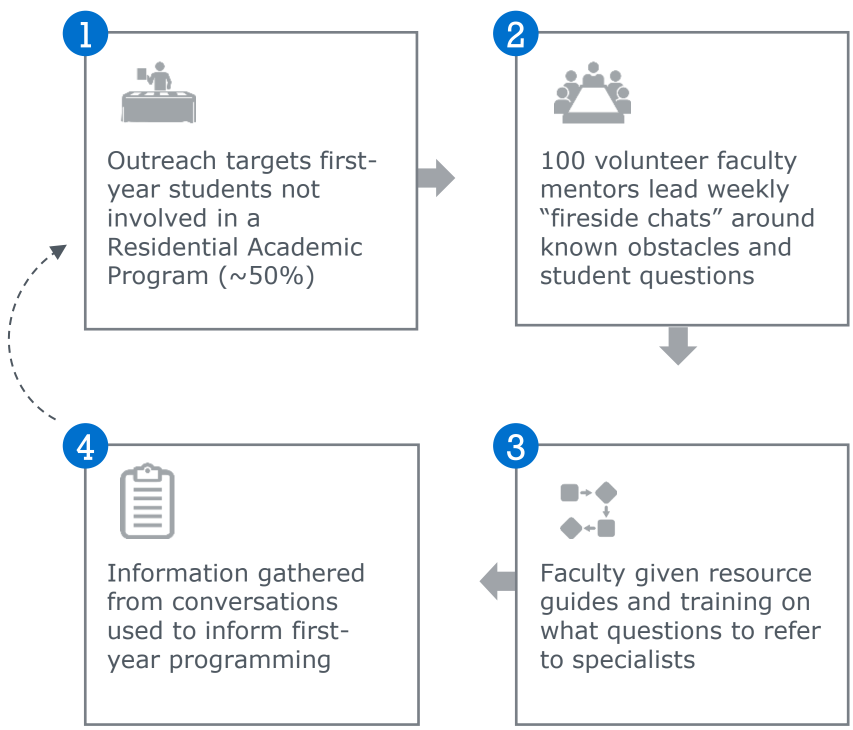
Faculty mentors hold weekly "fireside chats" around common academic and non-academic obstacles that students tend to face during their first year. They are armed with a week-by-week topic syllabus and guidance on when to refer difficult questions to specialists.

Deploying Mentoring Efforts to Proactively Address Long-Term Risk

The Faculty-Student Mentor Program

University of Colorado Boulder

- Program created by Faculty Assembly to address upper-division success
- Students encouraged to sign up at orientation and throughout summer
- Students are matched to mentors based on interests and major choice
- Online sign-up form gathers critical information to assess risk (anticipated credit load, employment plans, concerns)



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Sign Up-Form

Template – University of Colorado, Boulder

University of Colorado Boulder

General Information

1. Student Name: ____
2. Email Address: ____
3. Phone Number: ____
4. Residency Status:
   - ❑ In-State
   - ❑ Out-of-State

Student Interests

5. Personal Interests (check all that apply):
   - ❑ Art
   - ❑ Band/Orchestra/Choir
   - ❑ Biking
   - ❑ Cooking
   - ❑ Dancing
   - ❑ Exercising
   - ❑ Hiking
   - ❑ Intramural Sports
   - ❑ Movies
   - ❑ Music
   - ❑ Photography
   - ❑ Politics and Government
   - ❑ Reading
   - ❑ Faith and Religion
   - ❑ Sports
   - ❑ Theatre
   - ❑ Travel
   - ❑ Writing

6. Academic Interests (check all that apply):
   - ❑ Arts (e.g., art history, music dance)
   - ❑ Biology and Health Sciences (e.g., biology, nursing, psychology)
   - ❑ Business (e.g., consulting, finance, marketing)
   - ❑ Education
   - ❑ Environmental Sciences (e.g., sustainability, ecology)
   - ❑ Humanities (e.g., philosophy, English, foreign languages)
   - ❑ Mathematics, Computing, and Engineering (e.g., computer science, IT, data analytics)
   - ❑ Media and Journalism (e.g., communications, public relations, advertising)
   - ❑ Physical Sciences (e.g., chemistry, geology, physics)
   - ❑ Social Sciences (e.g., economics, history, political science)

7. Prospective Major or Minor: ____

8. Do you prefer to be matched by:
   - ❑ Your personal interests
   - ❑ Your major and academic interests
   - ❑ Either one

Source: University of Colorado – Boulder Faculty Assembly.

Student Sign Up-Form (continued)

Logistical Information

9. Do you plan on working during your first semester?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No
10. If yes, do you plan on working:
    - ❑ On campus
    - ❑ Off campus
    - ❑ I am not sure yet
11. List the days and times of the week you will be available for mentoring sessions.

    ____

    ____

Student Concerns and Motivations

12. What do you hope to learn from your mentor?____

    ____

13. What concerns do you have about your first semester?______________________________________

    ____

14. Is this your first choice institution?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
15. If not, are you planning to transfer?
    - ❑ Yes
    - ❑ No
16. If yes, what institution are you planning to transfer to?_____________________________________

17. Additional information you would like to share about yourself. _______________________________

    ____

18. How did you hear about the faculty student mentoring program?
    - ❑ Orientation
    - ❑ Social Media
    - ❑ Website
    - ❑ Email
    - ❑ Family Member or Friend
    - ❑ Other

Source: University of Colorado – Boulder Faculty Assembly.

Sample Faculty Mentoring Syllabus

Week	Topic
Week 1	**Transitioning to College** Faculty mentors meet with students in residential halls to acquaint students to their new surroundings. Mentors offer advice on how to deal with homesickness, how to overcome social anxiety, and the differences between high school and college. This session can also be used to strategically identify early attrition risk by surveying students about their intent to transfer and level of disengagement at the institution.
Week 2	**Success in Lecture Courses** By the second mentoring session, students have attended a few of their courses and are aware of the differences between high school and college-level coursework and academic expectations. Topics broached in this session may include how to participate in class, tips on note-taking, and how to prepare for recitation sessions that are a part of larger lecture courses.
Week 3	**Time Management** Time management is a concept that almost every college freshman struggles with as new students are awarded much more free time throughout the day and more autonomy in their course selection, studying practices, and exam preparation. Mentors can offer advice on how much time students should devote to each class per week and how to budget one’s time effectively between academic and social engagements.
Week 4	**Campus Organizations and Clubs** By the fourth week of classes, students have probably attended a number of orientation sessions and campus events that introduce the various types of clubs and organizations students can participate in. In this session, mentors may ask representatives from student groups to present to the group based on the specific interests and hobbies of their mentees. In addition, mentors can recommend participation in certain types of co-curricular activities that facilitate a student’s longer term academic and career goals.
Week 5	**Study Skills for Midterms and Finals** In week five, midterm examinations are approaching and students will most likely have questions on how to effectively prepare for those exams. This is an opportunity for faculty members to offer broad advice on how students can organize their study materials, model their study habits to their particular learning style, and approach different types of midterm examinations. Since students and mentors are typically matched based on academic interests, faculty mentors can share their in-depth knowledge of how particular disciplines test subject areas.
Week 6	**What to Discuss in Faculty Office Hours** Freshmen students can be easily intimidated by the professors instructing their large lecture courses, where students might fade into the background. However, it is imperative that students become comfortable speaking with faculty early on because later academic success depends increasingly on interactions with faculty in the student’s disciplinary area. Mentors can equip students with sets of questions to ask in office hour sessions so that students come prepared to engage with their professors.
Week 7	**Mid-Semester Outing** It is important to give students the opportunity to release some steam midway through the semester by organizing a fun group activity. This might be something simple like gathering for coffee at a local café or something more involved like going to a campus performance or sporting event. Having a relaxed session halfway through the semester reminds students that the mentorship program is designed to be a fun way to engage with faculty members rather than a freshmen requirement.
Week 8	**Managing Stress** By week 8, students are about halfway through the semester and start to feel the burden of balancing more intense academic curriculum with social obligations. This session should introduce relaxation strategies to help students release their stress in positive ways. In addition, mentors should orient students to the various student support services at their disposal (e.g., mental health, counseling).

Sample Faculty Mentoring Syllabus (cont.)

Week	Topic
Week 9	**Choosing a Major** Since early major selection gets students on track to timely graduation and positively impacts student retention and graduation rates, mentors should use this session to explore student academic interests and help students find a right-fit major. While many students still might be unsure about their choice, bringing major selection to their attention early will help keep major top of mind as they advance into their spring semester.
Week 10	**Course Selection** By week 10, students are nearing the registration period for the upcoming semester. After a full semester of new courses, personal exploration, and academic and career planning, students should be ready to select a more cohesive set of courses that relate to their longer-term academic goals. Faculty knowledge of their discipline as well as their relationships with their colleagues can inform student decisions on interesting courses to take and strong professors in certain disciplinary areas.
Week 11	**Career Planning** As a follow-up to the major choice and course selection sessions, faculty mentors can use the career planning session to map student interests to potential career tracks and job opportunities. Mentors may ask career services representatives to present to their mentees on the services they offer. This is also a good opportunity to have students take assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Strengthsfinder 2.0, or Strong Interest Inventory to help them match their interests, skills, and personalities to their educational and career goals.
Week 12	**Paper Writing** The style, length, and depth of analysis involved in college-level paper writing differs greatly from the type of writing students are used to from high school. In this session, mentors can offer students advice on how to brainstorm, outline, and structure college-level papers. In addition, students should be offered a writing tips worksheet with quick fixes for reforming their writing style (e.g., present over passive voice, avoidance of "to be" verbs).
Week 13	**Introduction to Co-Curricular Activities** Involvement in co-curricular activities like undergraduate research, living and learning communities, capstone projects, on-campus employment, study abroad, and service-based learning is strongly correlated with student retention and timely graduation. Since students leave the comfort and insulation of extensive first-year programming like the faculty mentoring program after their freshman year, this is a good opportunity to introduce the variety of available co-curricular activities for upperclassmen. Since faculty participation is an integral part of many co-curricular programs, faculty mentors are well-positioned to speak to the value added for participation in the programs.
Week 14	**Studying for Finals** While faculty mentors led a session on studying for midterms in week 5, students would benefit from a refresher session on strategies to prepare for final examinations. Often, final exams are much longer and require many more components (e.g., writing sections, fill-in-the blank) than midterm exams. This session should offer recommendations for finals-specific needs (e.g., creating study plans during reading days, organizing essays in blue books, budgeting time during extended exam sessions).
Week 15	**End of Semester Outing** Faculty mentors should end the semester with a fun outing with all of their mentees. This may be a dinner at the mentor's home, a campus performance or concert, an athletic event, or a holiday party. The final session should celebrate the strides that the mentees have made in acclimating to college life, exploring their academic and career interests, and getting involved in campus life and culture.

Predicting Preventable Transfer Losses

A significant share of attrition among colleges and universities occurs among students in good academic standing; many of these students are simply transferring to other institutions, rather than dropping or stopping out.

While it is in no institution's best interest to prevent all transfer losses, few have made serious efforts to identify and attempt to retain students considering transfer due to a lack of engagement.

By surveying new students to gauge their interest in and commitment to the institution, connecting students at risk to transfer with faculty mentors in their area of interest, collecting data from students who leave to enroll elsewhere, and actively monitoring transcript requests, institutions can create a cohesive intervention strategy that helps to mitigate unnecessary attrition.

Students who view their first term or even first two years at an institution as a mere stepping stone to a different university are not likely to engage in the small seminar courses and extra-curricular activities that foster a sense of belonging. Faculty are well-positioned to convince these students to stay, by showing them programs, courses, and opportunities that match students' long-term ambitions.

From Stepping Stone to Disciplinary Destination

37%
Of all first-time students transfer or enroll at a different institution at least once within 6 years

33%
Attrition that occurs after the 2nd year in good academic standing

40%
Of leavers have estimated GPAs above 3.25

Portland State University

Proactive Identification of Engagement Risk

Orientation survey, involvement analysis, or advisor referral prompts mentoring outreach

1 *Matriculation*

2 **Students Matched with Faculty Mentors**

Meeting with faculty in desired program to discuss opportunities for co-curricular involvement

UC DAVIS

3 *Transfer*

Exit Survey

Diagnose motivation to inform attrition analysis

Graduation

Reactive Engagement Monitoring

Transcript requests analyzed to identify potential transfer risks—students connected with faculty mentor

Source: Delta Cost Project "Measuring the Costs of Attrition"; National Clearinghouse Transfer and Mobility Report; EAB interviews and analysis.

Sustaining Momentum Through Accountability

The Right Metrics and Management Tools to Create Ownership for Student Success Among Distributed Units

PART 3

- Leadership Scorecards
- Performance-Based Bonus Funding
- Departmental Performance Dashboards

Avoiding Pitfalls in Incentive Design

Creating accountability for student success among academic units relies on the establishment of meaningful metrics for evaluation—but what should we measure, and who should we hold accountable for students' outcomes?

In developing key performance indicators for student success, it is important to address common concerns with measurement at the outset; for example, ensure that units are not penalized in retention or completion measurements when students are retained or complete elsewhere at the institution. Further, consider adopting a "native junior" graduation rate, which evaluates academic departments and colleges according to the share of students in their programs with at least 60 credits completed who finish their degree in two, three, or four years—this addresses concerns about unfairly punishing units for first- and second-year attrition.

Finally, metrics and performance incentives should focus on *directly controllable* outcomes. Unit leaders and individual faculty members need indicators that relate to their day-to-day and term-to-term choices, not institution-wide numbers that seem abstract and intractable.

Adjusted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Allow for Fair and Effective Assessment

Anticipate and Counteract Perverse Incentives

"We'll fight over students if we take retention too seriously"

➡ Units not penalized when students are retained or graduate at the institution

"Incentivizing greater retention means inflating grades"

➡ Create and monitor quality KPIs to prevent exploitation

"We can't be held accountable for early attrition and undecided students"

➡ Incentivize units to improve "native junior" graduation rate

Evaluate Units and Individuals Based on Controllable Outcomes

"External factors often cause spikes in the data—we can't control that"

➡ Use rolling three-year averages to compensate for outlier trends

"How can I move the dial on an institution-wide metric?"

➡ Measure and reward concrete activities that contribute to institutional success

"I have different students and a different mission than other units"

➡ Allow for limited customization in metric design and weight

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Starting at the Top

Accountability must begin with institutional leadership. When the president, provost, and senior cabinet members are publicly evaluated based on outcomes that align with institutional priorities, it is both easier to build a broader system of performance evaluation throughout staff and faculty ranks, and to signal the importance of those priorities to otherwise skeptical stakeholders.

The University of West Georgia, for example, has developed *leadership scorecards* for the president and each of his direct reports. These public performance grids include a number of specific targets for both student and operational success. Performance is assessed on a 1-5 scale based on pre-assigned improvement targets over the previous year.

Scorecards also include a number of tactical goals, which outline strategic objectives like “develop and institute a divisional professional development program.” While these goals do not have an attached metric, the scorecards allow everyone to measure progress towards the prior year’s strategic goals.

Goals and metrics should both align across the organization (ensuring that everyone is working toward the same ends) and become narrower for managerial and frontline leaders.

Public Performance Reports Set the Stage for Organization-Wide Action

UNIVERSITY of West Georgia

President’s Scorecard

Provost’s Scorecard

Imperative	Measure	Tool	Scale
Student Success	Degree Attainment Retention Graduation	Degrees Conferred Retention Rate 6-Year Grad Rate	5 = 2,400; 75%; 44% 4 = 2,350, 74%; 43% 3 = 2,300, 73%; 42% 2 = 2,250, 72.5%; 41.5% 1 = 2,150, 72%; 41%

Aligned at each level

Vice President of Enrollment Management’s Scorecard

Imperative	Measure	Tool	Scale
Student Success	FY Retention 2-3rd year Progression	Retention Rate 30 SCH, 60 SCH	5=77%; 61% 4=76%; 60% 3=75%; 59% 2=74%; 58% 1=73%; 57%
Operational Success	Total Enrollment	Headcount	5 = above 12,700 4 = 12,600-12,700 3 = 12,450-12,600 2 = 12,200-12,450 1 = below 12,200

Specific to each role

Next step (2016)

Unit Director’s Scorecard (Ex: Director of Advising)

Imperative	Measure	Tool	Scale
Student Success	FY Retention 2-3rd year Progression	Number of Freshman Degree Plans Advising Meetings for Sophomores	Evaluation metrics and grading scale to be determined
Operational Success	Satisfaction	Advisor and Advisee Satisfaction Rates	Evaluation metrics and grading scale to be determined

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Signaling Expectations to Deans

At large, decentralized institutions, informal evaluation is often insufficient to change unit behavior. Instead, leaders at these campuses are increasingly exploring budgetary incentives related to student success, placing the specifics of the strategies in deans' hands.

At the University of Kentucky, colleges can compete for a share of a large, central seed fund based on unit-level student success plans and improvement on outcomes. At the University of California – Riverside, leaders are constructing a new budget model that will incentivize improvement on four-year graduation rates.

Middle Tennessee State University's approach to decanal engagement in student success exemplifies important lessons for any institutional incentive system: the president's $250,000 annual seed fund is awarded to colleges after an annual review in which deans present promising retention and completion initiatives, report on progress toward previously-agreed-upon goals, and develop formal plans for the next budget cycle. These reviews allow senior leaders to take stock of distributed activity and facilitate investment in strategies that are working.

Decentralized Institutions Exploring Outcomes-Based Incentives for Units

Accelerating Distributed Investment

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Bonus Pool

- $5M in funding from provost will go to colleges with improved outcomes and plans for retention and graduation efforts

UC RIVERSIDE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Performance-Based Funding

- New budget model will incentivize 4-year graduation rate improvements as well as credit hours and majors.

1 Ensure that goals and investments are aligned with central strategy

2 Provide a venue for sharing best practices among leaders

3 Require formal college and/or unit-level improvement plans

Maintaining Ongoing Accountability

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Annual Review

- Deans present yearly progress on retention, graduation rates, and re-enrollment efforts by college and department
- Review hearings are tied to annual budgeting process and impact funding decisions
- President awards $250,000 for college-level programming and $25,000 to most improved department

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Creating Departmental Accountability

The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire's approach to unit-level accountability for student success has set the standard for rigor and impact.

Their "Strategic Accountability Matrix," or SAM, measures each of their 40+ academic departments on a range of 18 priorities according to the difference between their *expected* and *actual* performance. The resulting scores across all measures determine each department's share of a $400,000 central fund, which provides much-needed discretionary dollars for departments in a state budget climate that has been challenging over the last several years.

Departments can also ask for individual measures to be weighted differently, through approval by their dean and the provost. This accounts for significant differences in mission or enrollment. Philosophy, for example, might be measured less stringently on internship placements, while Mathematics might be measured more stringently on first-year success rates.

The most important feature of this matrix is the specificity of the column-level priorities. Departmental leaders and faculty are working toward concrete, accomplishable objectives, rather than abstract goals (such as "quality") or institution-wide outcomes (such as graduation rates).

Mission-Adjusted Performance Bonuses Push Academic Units to Improve Outcomes

University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

Strategic Accountability Matrix

Department	Student Success Metric			
	Example: **Student Credit Hours lost to DFW**			
	Weight	*Expected*	*Actual*	*Score*
Anthropology	1.0	201	173	▲ **1.16**
Biology	2.0	381	518	▼ **0.74**
English	1.0	1,879	1,303	▲ **1.44**

Metric weight adjusted according to unit characteristics (Philosophy judged less on internship placements)

Negotiated by chair, dean, and provost to avoid unjustified alterations to formula

Ratio of actual to expected performance determines share of annual bonus funds ($400,000 pool)

Department performance evaluated across 18 strategic priorities, including:

High-Impact Practices

1. Internships
2. Intercultural immersion
3. Freshmen degree plans
4. Advisee satisfaction

Student Progression

1. Credit hours lost to DFW
2. Midterm grade reports
3. 30 credits first year
4. 60 credits first two years

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Measurement Spurs Grassroots Innovation

The ongoing usage of SAM at UW Eau Claire has led to significant improvement among academic departments on almost every measure. Some departments, for example, rethought their approach to teaching introductory courses and course sequencing after noticing poor performance among at-risk first-year students.

Others invested additional faculty and staff time to ensure that students file degree plans with their advisors. When the SAM measured midterm grade reporting among faculty for the first time in 2015, compliance rates increased dramatically across the institution. Clearly, articulating specific, expected outcomes and sharing progress in a public forum has played a large role in enfranchising faculty in student success.

More broadly, institutional leaders report that this process has had an impact on the academic culture on campus. For the first time, individual faculty members and departments can visually see how their efforts, from advising and mentoring students to engaging them in co-curricular experiences, ultimately add up to substantial institutional improvement. Recognizing their role among others in determining that success has led to true, grassroots innovation—which, as we have argued, is sure to outlast any top-down changes or initiatives.

Departments Quick to React to Now-Visible Performance Gaps with Meaningful Solutions

1 Local Curricular Reforms

Aligning pre-requisites with local community colleges: Biology department adjusted introductory curriculum to better suit transfer students

Revitalizing first-year instruction: Low-enrollment science programs shifted from "weeding freshmen out" to more engaged pedagogy

2 Greater Investment in Student Support

Increasing instructional support for at-risk groups: Psychology department added supplemental instruction to address noticeable achievement gap

Requiring four-year degree plans: Share of all first-year students with complete degree plans grew 45% in first two years of assessment

3 Lasting Cultural Change

Clarifying each unit's role in contributing to institutional performance goals: Unprecedented awareness of how the actions of each department add up to ultimate success or failure

Preempting performance-based funding: Faculty, staff, and unit leaders acclimated to culture of evaluation and focused on continuous improvement, without top-down system dictate

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Academic Policy Audit

Toolkit for Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

APPENDIX

Academic Policy Diagnostic

Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

This resource, organized by category, will help you determine where your institution's academic rules, regulations, and processes might create unnecessary obstacles for students. **Detailed descriptions of each policy and relevant resources are included at the listed page number**.

A small committee should review this list and evaluate the institution's approach to each policy according to its relative leniency. In order to represent all relevant areas of academic policy and planning at a high level of organizational structure, the ideal academic policy audit committee should include the Provost, the Registrar, the head of Undergraduate Studies, and representatives from student government and the faculty senate.

Too Lenient ✗		Best Practice ✓		Too Strict ✗	
Degree Planning					
Degree Plan Requirements					60
Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning	☐	Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor	☐	Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan	☐
Degree Milestones					62
Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses	☐	Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting	☐	Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course	☐
Experiential Education Requirements					64
Do not require experiential learning activities	☐	Integrate experiential learning into credit-bearing courses	☐	Require non-credit-bearing experiential learning activities	☐
Transfer Credit Articulation					66
Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit	☐	Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation	☐	Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis	☐
Accelerating Degree Progress					
Remedial Education					68
Allow students to complete remedial coursework any time in the first two years	☐	Enroll students with remedial needs in for-credit summer courses before the first year	☐	Require students to complete remediation before matriculating	☐
Course Load					70
Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term	☐	Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits	☐	Require all students to take 15 credits per term to be considered full-time	☐
Major Declaration					72
Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution	☐	Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree	☐	Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation	☐
Excess Credit Accumulation					74
Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance	☐	Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status	☐	Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements	☐

Academic Policy Diagnostic (cont.)

Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

Too Lenient		Best Practice		Too Strict	
Registration and Course Scheduling					
Bursar Holds					76
Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount	☐	Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register	☐	Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid	☐
Multi-term Registration					78
Allow students to register for only one academic term at a time, excluding intersession	☐	Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once	☐	Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans	☐
Course Wait Lists					80
Create a new section any time a course hits 100% fill rate to accommodate demand	☐	Override registration caps for some students until wait list reaches enrollment minimum	☐	Do not allow students to register for courses after courses reach capacity	☐
Preventing Unnecessary Withdrawals					
Early Academic Alerts					82
Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades	☐	Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe	☐	Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline	☐
Course Repeats					84
Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions	☐	Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat	☐	Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements	☐
Course and Institutional Withdrawal					86
Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction	☐	Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal	☐	Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal	☐
Academic Probation and Dismissal					88
Allow students to remain on probation indefinitely, regardless of improvement	☐	Require students on probation to reverse GPA trend to continue at the institution	☐	Dismiss students if they fail to improve academic standing after one probationary term	☐
Student Messaging and Outreach					
Student Communications					90
Allow faculty and staff to communicate with all students as frequently as desired	☐	Centrally coordinate and schedule messages to large numbers of students	☐	Require all student communications to come from one central office	☐
Student Aid Renewal					92
Do not require students to refile financial aid forms after the first year	☐	Send a series of escalating “nudges” reminding students to refile financial aid forms	☐	Use registration holds to require students to refile financial aid forms	☐
Non-registered Students					94
Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term	☐	Call students who fail to register before the deadline for unexplained reasons	☐	Automatically register students for courses using a prescriptive degree plan	☐

Degree Plan Requirements

Require First-Year Students to Create and File Degree Plans

Understanding the Problem

In order for students to graduate on time, they need a clear understanding of the optimal timing and order of graduation requirements. Course catalogs typically include a list of the credits students need to complete a degree in each major, but do not contain detail about how to build a course schedule based on these requirements. Students may also struggle with balancing a full course load with work or other responsibilities, and without a flexible plan their progress can be quickly disrupted if they are unable to secure a seat in a required course during the desired term. To account for limited advisor time, students need to be able to self-advise as much as possible in order to build an achievable and comprehensive four-year plan.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient (✖)

Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning

- Consideration for time-to-degree not at the forefront
- Difficult for students to determine whether they are on track to graduate and how much time is left

Best Practice (✔)

Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor

- Degree plan should include prerequisites for the student's prospective major
- Students and advisors should review and update plans as often as once per term

Too Strict (✖)

Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan

- Does not allow students to customize their degree plans to their individual situation, work responsibilities, study abroad, etc.

Considerations for Implementation

1

Integrate "what-if" mapping into degree planning

- Students can test scenarios, explore how different course choices would affect their plans
- Enable students to see how deviation from plan would affect time-to-degree
- Encourage students to explore majors and proactively plan for multiple alternatives

2

Mandate early completion of co-curricular requirements

- Students should complete co-curricular and distribution requirements in the first two years when possible
- Include these requirements (foreign language, writing-intensives, etc.) in degree plans and require a waiver for late completion

3

Use degree plans to predict course and program demand

- Courses that appear most frequently in student degree plans may require additional sections
- Programs with growing demand may indicate majors that must add capacity in order to admit all student applicants

Degree Plan Requirements (cont.)

Key Attributes of Next-Generation Degree Planning Tools

"What-If?" Mapping

- Students can plug in a potential major, minor, or term schedule and see the resulting time and credits needed to graduate
- **Useful for:** Students who are considering a change of major or adding a minor

Non-credit Activity Mapping

- Students can include study abroad programs, internships, and other not-for-credit activities in degree maps in order to plan schedules and workload
- **Useful for:** All undergraduate students

Standard Degree Plan

Sample Schedule	Credit Hours	Milestones
Year 1: Fall Semester		
English Composition 101	3	Complete English Composition with a C or greater
Calculus 141	3	
Foreign Language	4	
Intro to Chemistry 1	3	Complete Introduction to Chemistry with a B or greater
	N/A	Meet with advisor to register for classes
Social Science 101	3	
Total hours	**16**	
Year 1: Spring Semester		
Foreign Language	4	Complete at least one semester of a foreign language by the end of the first year
Calculus 142	3	Complete Calculus 141 and 142 by the end of the first year
Intro to Chemistry 2 with lab	4	
Intro to Biology 1	4	Complete Intro to Biology 1 with a C or greater
Total hours	**15**	

GPA Calculation

- Students can easily view transfer GPA as well as predicted GPA based on current term performance
- **Useful for:** Students with large amounts of credit from different sources, students trying to meet requirements for a selective major

Transfer Credit Articulation

- Degree maps have credit equivalencies for transfer, AP/IB, and other credit built in, so students do not need to calculate it manually
- **Useful for:** Students bringing in large amounts of credit from other sources

Exploratory Meta-Major Paths

- Students can select an "exploratory" model degree plan that recommends prerequisites for multiple major options within a subject area
- **Useful for:** Students unsure of their exact major choice, students who hope to major in a selective program

Course Substitutions

- Advisors and faculty can mark a course as "substituting" for a required credit for a student's major
- **Useful for:** Students with late-stage major changes, transfer students from out-of-state institutions

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Degree Milestones

Educate and Remind Students About Critical Course and Grade Milestones

Understanding the Problem

Students who deviate from degree plans may sometimes be able to recover on their own, but other cases, a missed course or poor academic performance can be a sign that a student needs personal academic support in order to continue toward timely graduation. These students may need remedial courses, a different major, or even financial resources, and might not proactively seek out assistance on their own. Using historical data, institutions can pinpoint these **"milestone" courses and grades** that best predict attrition risk. Then, they can create a system of incentives that encourages students to make success-focused choices, prevent excessive deviation from their planned degree pathways, and support students if they miss degree milestones.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses

- Students can continue to get off track from degree plans without advising
- No opportunity for advisors to get to know students and share resources

Best Practice ✔

Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting

- Missed milestones may be a sign of bad-fit major or other potentially serious issues
- Advising time can be spent on degree mapping and creating an academic plan to meet milestones in the future

Too Strict ✖

Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course

- Does not account for missed milestones due to scheduling issues, etc.
- Would create excessive workload and service bottlenecks in advising

Considerations for Implementation

1

Escalate complex student cases to specialized offices

- If students miss a grade GPA milestone, tutoring or supplemental instruction can help them remain on track
- If students are considering dropping out of the institution for personal reasons, Student Affairs staff can step in

2

Audit degree milestones before and after each term

- A pre-term registration audit reveals missing courses
- A post-term GPA audit reveals missed milestone grades
- Audits take place before and after registration periods, so missed-milestone meetings do not occur during busiest times for advisors

3

Make messages to students positive, not punitive

- Historical data and predictive analytics should be used to start and support conversations about alternative options, not to dictate certain outcomes
- Student-facing notifications should focus on future choices, not simply at-risk status

Degree Milestones (cont.)

Building Milestone-Based Degree Plans

Example Degree Plan: Natural Sciences

Sample Schedule	Credit Hours	Milestones
Year 1: Fall Semester		
English Composition 101	3	Complete English Comp with a C or greater
Calculus 141	3	
Foreign Language	4	
Intro to Chemistry	3	Complete Intro to Chemistry with a B or greater
	N/A	Meet with advisor to register for classes
Social Science 101	3	
Total hours	**16**	
Year 1: Spring Semester		
Foreign Language	4	Complete at least one semester of a foreign language by the end of the first year
Calculus 142	3	Complete Calculus 141 and 142 by the end of the first year
Intro to Chemistry 2 with lab	4	
Intro to Biology 1	4	Complete Intro to Biology 1 with a C or greater
Total hours	**15**	

Grade threshold

- Track student progress and ensure that performance is predictive of on-time completion
- Define based on historical outcomes, not major prerequisites (example: students who achieve lower than a 'C' in Intro to Biology do not typically graduate from the nursing program)

Co-curricular milestone

- Can include graduation requirements (e.g. required internship) or advisor meetings
- Recommended actions can include completing a career inventory

General education requirement

- Students should complete most general education requirements in the first two years
- Require a dean or advisor waiver to complete requirements after the recommended term

Bottleneck course

- Courses common to most students
- Encourage first- or second-year completion

Degree Plan Best Practices

A+

'C' grades are not always predictive of overall success

Use historical student data to determine the best grade threshold; for example, students with less than a 'B' in calculus might not succeed in Engineering

Design degree plans to keep students at a full course load

Model degree plans should demonstrate a course load of 15 credits per term to encourage on-time graduation

Develop model plans that reflect common transfer pathways

Departments should consider designing a transfer-specific plan if most transfers will be missing key first-year requirements upon matriculation

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Experiential Education Requirements

Incorporate Experiential Learning Requirements into Classroom Instruction

Understanding the Problem

Experiential learning opportunities, from internships and co-ops to project-based service learning, help students connect coursework to their real-world interests and career goals and give them much-needed qualifications when they enter the workplace. But by default, high-achieving students seek out these opportunities while others are unaware of the possible options for career development. To encourage more widespread participation, institutions are beginning to experiment with mandating (typically co-curricular or extracurricular) experiential learning or career-focused activities as part of degree requirements. Without further guidance, however, students often leave these requirements until late in their academic experience (often assuming they are most useful right before entering the workplace—and missing out on an opportunity for timely exploration). Some may even put them off altogether, requiring universities to waive them or risk forcing students to delay graduation.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require experiential learning activities

- Typically means only the most-motivated students take advantage of opportunities on campus
- Leaves many students' assumptions about careers untested, and limits their career preparation

Best Practice

Integrate experiential learning into credit-bearing courses

- Incorporating business and community partners into course projects helps students directly connect coursework to real-world issues and careers
- Students do not have to consciously incorporate activities into degree planning

Too Strict

Require non-credit-bearing experiential learning activities

- Causes some students to delay graduation if they have not completed the requirement in time
- Disconnects experiential learning from students' classroom experiences

Considerations for Implementation

1

Build opportunities for reflection and narration into all experiential activities

- Studies show that experiential learning is most valuable if students reflect and connect it back to their studies and goals
- Projects, assignments, and resume workshops help students clarify the long-term meaning of their involvement

2

Equip academic and career advisors to help students explore in the first two years

- Students and advisors should discuss co-curricular major maps and career assessments
- Opportunities such as job shadowing and service learning help guide students' choice of major and are valuable early in the student lifecycle

3

Help students build a narrative around general education coursework

- Many students view general education as a disjointed "buffet" of disciplinary options
- Grouping courses around real-world topics or themes, ideally followed by a gen. ed. capstone course, helps students connect coursework to their goals

Experiential Education Requirements (cont.)

Five Ideas for Integrating Experiential Learning into the Curriculum

First-Year Field Experience

First-year students conduct a short-term site visit to participate in a research or industry project connected to a discipline of interest

- **When:** Before the first year, often during a new student orientation
- **Implementation Challenges:** Bringing students to campus early and providing housing

Western Washington University — *Viking Launch*

Experiential Pathways

Students have the option to count study abroad, undergraduate research, or an internship toward their general education requirements, with faculty oversight

- **When:** Any time before a student completes their general education requirements
- **Implementation Challenges:** Altering gen. ed. requirements and ensuring rigor

Virginia Tech — *Pathways to General Education*

Syllabus Competency Mapping

Faculty map syllabus requirements to skills chosen from a list built by career advisors

- **When:** Any time
- **Implementation Challenges:** Ensuring widespread adoption by faculty, helping students map skills to achievements for resume-building

Memorial University

Skills-oriented Core

Students have the option to substitute a skill- or industry-oriented track for gen. ed. courses

- **When:** First two years
- **Implementation Challenges:** Determining core requirements, finding course instructors

UCCS — *Innovation Core*

Project-based Learning

Students work on a project for a community or business partner as part of a course

- **When:** Any time
- **Implementation Challenges:** Finding community partners

(many institutions)

Provide support for faculty in identifying and communicating with community partners

Case Study: University of Alabama Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility

- 5-6 staff members oversee database that enables communication between stakeholders (students, faculty, partners, staff)
- Use database to match faculty with community partners
- Help faculty find funding sources

The University of Alabama

Source: Western Washington University, "Viking Launch," wwu.edu/vikinglaunch; Virginia Tech, "Pathways to General Education," pathways.prov.vt.edu; EAB interviews and analysis.

Transfer Credit Articulation

Inform Students About Credit Transfer Prior to Matriculation

Understanding the Problem

Accurate degree planning requires students to know in advance how many of their courses from other institutions will be granted credit and/or count toward their degree requirements. When students are required to apply for transfer credit one course at a time, their degree maps will not accurately represent their accumulated credit and remaining credit. Transfer students also need a realistic estimate of the time and cost involved in obtaining a college degree; the more accurate the information they have when they enter the institution, the better they will be able to utilize financial aid and other support upon matriculating.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit

- Disregards concerns about student learning outcomes
- Dilutes institutional brand if only a few credits are earned at the institution that confers a degree

Best Practice ✔

Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation

- Transfer credit/GPA calculators allow students to plan time-to-degree before they enroll
- Proactive transcript analysis helps students determine degree cost

Too Strict ✖

Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis

- Requires students to spend excessive time petitioning for individual credits to transfer
- Complicates degree mapping of remaining requirements

Considerations for Implementation

1

Create internal articulation process for major changes

- Inform students considering a major change about non-overlap between prerequisite course sequences for original and new major
- Provide exceptions for similar courses
- Track common exceptions and non-exceptions to inform curricular planning

2

Offer brief online courses for easier transfer

- If credit does not transfer but students have taken a course similar to a requirement, offer a brief online "catch-up" course for credit
- Use historical data to determine which courses could most benefit from an online catch-up section

3

Provide review courses for common requirements

- Transfer students whose credit is accepted may still sometimes be unable to show all prerequisite competencies needed for a major requirement (e.g. numeracy or reading)
- Online, self-paced review courses can help these students improve their grades

Transfer Credit Articulation (cont.)

Franklin University's Best-in-Class Transfer Credit Dashboard

To further improve credit evaluation transparency, four-year institutions can provide prospective transfer students with estimated credit articulation information before they apply. Franklin University's enrollment management office developed the "My Transfer Credit" tool, a web-based self-service platform that permits prospective transfer students to generate personalized credit evaluation reports and time- and cost-to-degree estimates.

Overview of Franklin University's "My Transfer Credit" Tool

FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY

1 Prospects enter current or previous institutions, courses taken, and major of interest

2 Sum transferrable credits and report general education and major-specific progress

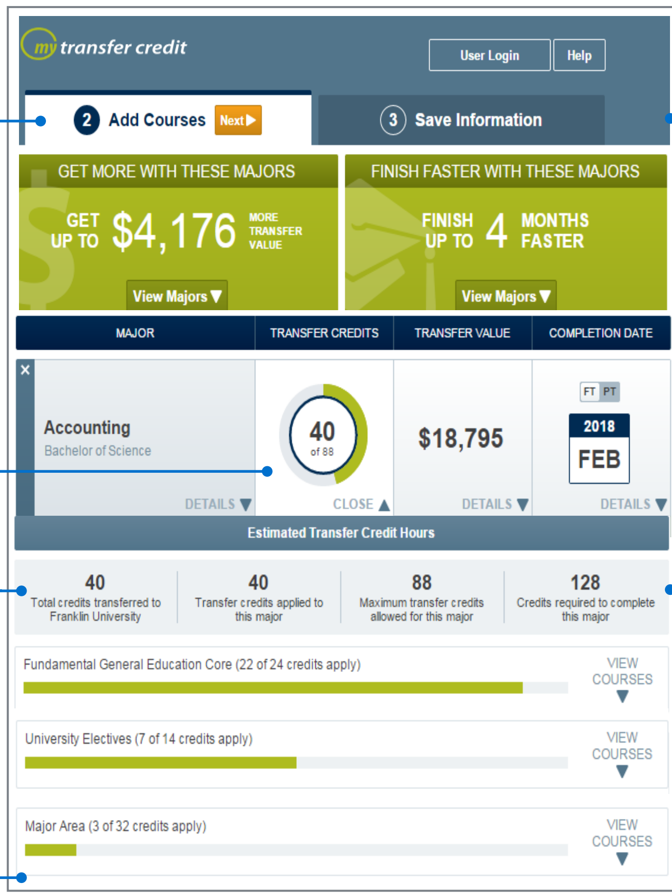


IMAGE CREDIT: FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY.

3 "Save profile" functionality tracks ongoing degree progress

4 Estimate time-to-degree to indicate required investment

5 Estimate cost-to-degree to clarify anticipated costs

6 Recommend course-corrections to save students time and money

Franklin University required few upfront investments to develop their online credit evaluation tool because it employed internal staff and an existing student information system: enrollment management staff uploaded historic credit equivalency tables and articulation agreements, and a cross-campus committee built the tool in-house over five months. These limited front-end investments positioned Franklin University to stand out to prospective transfer students—its easy-to-use online interface attracted incremental applications and enrollments and boosted yield.

Source: Franklin University, "My Transfer Credit," http://www.franklin.edu/transfer-credit-college-course-equivalency-tool; EAB interviews and analysis.

Remedial Education

Integrate Co-Requisite Remediation into Summer Early Start Coursework

Understanding the Problem

One of the greatest barriers academically at-risk students face when they arrive at college is the need to complete developmental coursework, typically in English and math. Students must complete remediation to even begin their college-level coursework—but unfortunately, despite universities' best efforts, many do not make it that far. Remedial courses have high failure rates, and students often drop out when they find they cannot complete them. Remediation slows students' progress, too. Remedial courses, while credit-bearing, do not contribute to degree requirements, so students with remedial needs take longer to graduate. Finally, and not to be ignored, is the effect of stereotype threat: students are less likely to succeed when they get the message that they are expected to struggle (for instance, if they are told they have remedial needs compared to their peers).

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow students to complete remedial coursework any time in the first two years

- Prevents entry into almost all general education and major requirements
- Remedial courses have high failure rates and often lead to early attrition

Best Practice

Enroll students with remedial needs in for-credit[1] summer courses before the first year

- Summer "early start" programs eliminate remedial needs by combining for-credit courses with academic support
- A cohort model promotes campus engagement

Too Strict

Require students to complete remediation before matriculating

- Limits admission for students who would likely succeed with support
- Remedial course success rates are even lower at 2-year institutions

Considerations for Implementation

1

Position programs to students as positive, welcoming—even exclusive

- Messages to students should emphasize that early start programs are an exciting opportunity to see the campus before their peers
- Avoid language addressing remediation or student risk

2

Enroll summer cohort students in wraparound support services

- Attending advising, tutoring, and supplemental instruction as a group builds community and promotes course success
- Study skills workshops and financial counseling are also valuable for this group

3

Utilize existing courses and financial aid structures to limit costs of instruction

- Summer sections of common first-year courses are already offered at most institutions
- Students with federal aid needs can submit the prior year's FAFSA form to start their aid enrollment early

1) For a literature review on the benefits of enrolling students directly in college-level coursework, see Complete College America, "The Research Behind Corequisite Remediation," January 13, 2016.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Remedial Education (cont.)

Georgia State's Success Academy Lays a Strong Foundation for the First Year

Georgia State University's Success Academy program provides a case study of summer corequisite remediation in action. Administrators there believed that students who would typically need remediation could succeed in college-level courses with additional support. Based on a predictive risk algorithm, Georgia State now selects about 300 students per year with high school GPAs or SAT scores lower than other admitted peers. Instead of requiring them to attend developmental courses during their first year, Georgia State invites these students to arrive early and begin college-level coursework *before* their first year.

For seven weeks, students live in learning community-style residence halls and attend general education courses in the humanities alongside sophomores and juniors taking summer courses. As a group, participants attend academic advising meetings and tutoring sessions, as well as workshops on study skills, financial literacy, and adjusting to college life.

To maintain the momentum students achieve through Success Academy, participants remain in their living-learning communities for the entirety of the first year—and have achieved college GPAs and first-year retention rates well above expectations, even exceeding the Georgia State average.

300+

First-year students with academic risk factors (lower GPA or SAT score than peers)

Georgia State University

To: Jane Student
Subject: You Are Invited!

Summer Success Academy

Live in campus housing

Enroll Full-Time in General Education Requirements

- English (3 credits)
- Choose one: History (3 credits) or Political Science (3 credits)
- First Year Seminar (1 credit)

Attend advising, support services as a cohort

Results: Success Academy Students Off to a Strong Start

7
College-level credits completed before participants' first year

87%
First-year retention for participants, compared to GSU average of 85%

3.29
Average GPA of participants, compared to 2.5 required GPA

Source: National League of Cities, "Georgia State Summer Success Academy"; EAB interviews and analysis.

Course Load

Treat Full Course Loads (15 or More Credits) as Default, Allowing for Exceptions

Understanding the Problem

At most colleges and universities, full-time tuition rates are set at 12 credit hours per term (in a semester model), allowing students to take an additional course or two at no additional cost. Too often, faculty and advisors recommend a lighter course load to at-risk students, hoping that they will spend more time per course and develop stronger study skills. In reality, students who take fewer than 15 courses per term are likely to take longer to graduate, accumulate more loan debt, and potentially begin to disengage from the institution in favor of off-campus employment or other concerns. Changing tuition structures can potentially endanger students' financial aid and is often out of the control of academic affairs, so academic policies must create other incentives for students to take a full course load.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient	Best Practice	Too Strict
✖	✔	✖
Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term	**Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits**	Require students to take 15 credit-hours per term to be considered full-time
• Implies that students can stay full-time but take five years to graduate • Students must take summer courses each year to graduate in four years at 12 credits per term	• Students understand that the goal is for them to graduate in four years • Allows students with special circumstances to take 12-14 credit hours without penalty	• Increases tuition cost and complicates financial aid eligibility policies • Potentially harms students with a legitimate need to enroll in a lighter course load

Considerations for Implementation

1

Provide financial incentives for at-risk students

- Scholarships contingent on following 4-year graduation pledges reduce financial risk for low-income, first-generation students who may not qualify for other merit-based aid programs
- Even small financial investments can reduce attrition for these populations

2

Promote student awareness of four-year graduation

- For lower-risk students, branding and marketing a "15 to Finish" effort can increase on-time graduation rate
- Awareness campaigns should illustrate positive behaviors such as attending advisor meetings, FAFSA submission, and summer enrollment

3

Reward academic units for 120-credit degree programs

- Many degree programs require more than 120 credits, which means even full-time students cannot graduate in four years
- Consider financial or other incentives for departments to reduce excessive credit requirements

Course Load (cont.)

Best Practices and Incentives to Encourage Four-Year Graduation

1 Set Expectations

Grand Valley State University

- Advisors work together with first-year and transfer students to register for courses during orientation
- Advisors must submit an underenrollment form for students who enroll in fewer than 15 credit hours
- Provides incentive for advisors
  - Advisors previously set expectation that enrolling in fewer courses would help students succeed in each individual course
  - Adding a process step changed default advisor behavior
- Contributed to 5% increase in graduation rate (alongside other efforts to improve student success)

2 Increase Student Awareness

University of Hawaii System

- Implemented public awareness campaign
- Students taking 15 credits increased by 14.7% in one year
- Research found students' GPA increased when they took 15 credits per term
- Website language stresses that students can take "3 credits for free"; flat-rate tuition is the same for all full-time students taking 12+ credits

University of West Virginia system

- Resource folder on "15 to Finish" web portal includes talking points, logo materials, sample press release, and sample social media posts

3 Define Successful Behaviors

University of Buffalo

- Students participating in *Finish in Four* take a "graduation pledge"
  - Students agree to once-per-term advising, on-time registration, career assessment, and completion of at least 25% of their graduation plans each year
- Students are also asked to model "success behaviors" such as working at a job no more than 20 hours per week and selecting a major by the third term
- Students who change their major can participate in *Finish in Four*, but only if they will still be able to maintain a four-year graduation plan

4 Provide Financial Incentives

Portland State University

- If students meet all the requirements of Portland State's Four-Year Degree Guarantee but are unable to graduate in four years due to course non-availability, PSU will not charge them tuition for any courses needed to complete their degrees.
  - Some students may also substitute a different course for a requirement

Adams State University

- Offers $500 scholarships to students taking 30 credits per year
- Expanded flat-rate tuition to cover 12-20 credits instead of the former 12-15
- Resulted in an 11% jump in credits attempted per semester

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Major Declaration

Require Students to Declare a Major During the Second Year

Understanding the Problem

Declaring a major in the second year is associated with higher rates of persistence and graduation, yet universities rarely require students to declare a major after accumulating a particular number of credits. Institutions which require students to matriculate directly into a college often provide pre-major programs and do not require students to transition into a degree-granting program in the second year. Even more challenging is the problem of finding a best-fit major, especially when students may indicate a preference for a highly selective degree program that does not accept all applicants. Requiring early major declaration and providing a support framework for students to explore major and career options and determine best fit ensures that students will not be delayed by late-stage major choices that require significant changes to their degree plans.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution

- Students not encouraged or incentivized to make progress toward degree
- Late-stage major declaration may leave students missing essential requirements

Best Practice

Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree

- Major declaration in the second year is associated with higher retention, graduation rates
- Allows second-year students to focus on prerequisites to gain entry into upper division

Too Strict

Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation

- May undermine institution's mission, especially at liberal arts institutions
- Students may select a poor-fit major in order to meet this requirement

Considerations for Implementation

1

Require an advisor meeting for third-year major changes

- Students can change their major with minimal penalty between 0 and 90 credit hours
- Major changes should trigger an advisor meeting to go over a revised degree plan and identify urgent courses to take

2

Create alternative pathways for high-demand majors

- Students often flounder after rejection from a selective program such as engineering, business, or nursing
- Develop related alternative majors (e.g. Health Science) to provide additional options for students with these career interests

3

Design policy to support transfer students

- Many transfer students come in with more than 60 credits
- Most transfer students already know their desired major, but it may be important to enforce major declaration upon enrollment for transfers

Major Declaration (cont.)

Helping Students Find and Declare a Best-Fit Major

More important than early major declaration is that students find a major suited to their personal, academic, and career interests, so that students remain with their first major choice and do not delay graduation by changing their major after the second year. Curricular and advising practices can encourage students to explore major and career options early and identify a best-fit program.

Curricular Guardrails

First-Year Seminar in Major

St. Edward's University

- Students can elect to take an exploratory first-year course introducing them to majors
- Course is co-taught by a faculty member and advisor in designated program
  - Advisor handles transactional tasks such as sending materials to students
  - Faculty assist students in designing major pathways

Exploratory Curricular Tracks

Rhode Island College

- Undeclared students select one of five interest areas: business, humanities, science/math, social or behavioral sciences
- Each interest area has a corresponding three-semester degree map including common prerequisites for multiple majors within the interest area and mandatory advising appointments
- Students are required to declare a major before 45 credits or a hold is placed on registration

Co-curricular and Advising Support

Intensive Exploratory Major and Career Advising Program

Florida State University

- Undeclared first-year students participate in an exploratory program
- Students complete "Choosing a Major" workbook exercises such as career interest inventory
- Students visit career center and meet with representatives to learn about connections between majors and careers
- Results: 98% of students participating declare a major by the end of the first year

Co-curricular Major and Career Maps

Queen's University

- Major maps outline possible careers in multiple sectors for each major
- Year-by-year map includes recommended/required courses, advising meetings, research and internships, options for study and work abroad, career preparation
- Helps students match their interests to a major and maintain momentum toward graduation and career

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Excess Credit Accumulation

Conduct Proactive Graduation Checks for Upper-Division Students

Understanding the Problem

Students who earn enough credits to graduate may still be unable to complete due to a small number of missing requirements. Other students continue to take courses after competing graduation requirements, unaware of the potential impact on their financial aid or student loan debt. Institutions can raise graduation rates by encouraging these students toward timely graduation. Student transcript audits to determine graduation preparedness ("graduation checks") need to be performed early, and students whose graduation checks reveal potential problems should be encouraged to meet with an advisor as soon as possible.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance

- Reduces graduation rate
- Creates student perception that delayed graduation is the norm
- Expensive for students and families to pay tuition

Best Practice ✔

Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status

- Ensure that students have met requirements and do not have outstanding fees
- Graduation checks at 75 credits ensure student can plan ahead for the entire senior year

Too Strict ✖

Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements

- Does not allow students to explore areas of interest
- Can be unpalatable to students, faculty, and parents who desire greater flexibility

Considerations for Implementation

1

Institute advising holds for students with excess credits

- Create registration holds for students who have met graduation requirements but did not graduate immediately
- Consider blocking further registration if students do not submit graduation applications themselves

2

Create financial aid cutoffs as an additional incentive

- Ceasing financial aid for students after they have met all graduation requirements encourages them to graduate
- Students may view the existing financial aid cutoff as the appropriate time to graduate even if it is significantly more than 120 credit hours

3

Discourage most senior-year major changes

- Students who reach 90+ credit status should be discouraged from late-stage major changes
- Students should be permitted to change their major if they are switching to an alternative program specifically to help them graduate on time

Excess Credit Accumulation (cont.)

Targeting Graduation Outreach to Student Populations

Students with **75 or more credit hours** (approaching senior status)

Transcript Audits

- **Graduation checks:** use degree planning software to review transcripts of students nearing senior status and notify students of remaining credits needed
- **Walk-in advising support:** make it simple for students to visit advising staff at any time and receive personal advice on how to design schedules to meet requirements

Students with **120 or more credit hours** who are unable to meet major graduation requirements

Fixing Unfulfilled Requirements

- **Prior credit:** work with students to determine if they can apply credit from other institutions, AP tests, or an assignment demonstrating relevant prior learning
- **Alternative major pathways:** analyze degrees to determine if students could graduate with a change to a major with less-stringent requirements (e.g. from Nursing to Public Health)
- **Graduation fulfillment courses:** designate specific courses for these students in majors where students commonly reach senior status with missing credits
- **Summer options:** provide additional sections of bottleneck courses during summer term, targeted toward students with senior status

Students with **120 or more credit hours** who have met requirements but not graduated (super-seniors)

Incentives for Timely Graduation

- **Advising holds:** require students to meet with an advisor before registering for additional courses
- **Financial aid limit:** change financial aid cutoff to prevent super-seniors from receiving aid (e.g. from 180 credits to 150 credits)
- **Administrative graduation:** simply mail diplomas to students who meet all graduation requirements

Students with **near 120 credit hours** who have left the institution in good academic standing

Re-enrollment Outreach

- **Proactive outreach:** call students who have left the institution in good standing with near 120 credits
- **Simple re-enrollment process:** allow students to apply using a simplified form and at low or no cost
- **Active support:** provide bursar account monitoring, small scholarship grants, and regular email/phone check-ups to guide students through their final term(s)

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Bursar Holds

Institute a Minimum Dollar Amount for Registration Holds Due to Unpaid Fees

Understanding the Problem

In order to ensure that students pay their fees on time, universities often institute a registration hold for students with unpaid balances. However, most institutions do little to inform students of the process to resolve a hold, nor do they provide financial resources that could assist students with paying fees. Often, students are not even aware they have outstanding fees, because their parents have been notified but the bursar does not contact students directly. First-generation students or other high-risk students may even resort to dropping out of the institution instead. Bursar holds need not be punitive or a roadblock to graduation—they should instead represent an opportunity to support students with financial needs, creating a stronger bond with the institution and a greater likelihood of term-to-term persistence.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount

- Leaves fewer student-facing incentives to pay fees on time
- Costly for universities if amount of outstanding student fees increases dramatically

Best Practice

Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register

- A $100-500 threshold is recommended for allowing registration (but triggering softer intervention)
- Contact students at least two weeks before registration to ensure timely payment

Too Strict

Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid

- Reduces retention rate and sense of resilience for students unable to pay fees
- Students may be unable to register for required courses due to seat caps

Considerations for Implementation

1

Provide emergency grants to at-risk students

- Small grants for students with financial risk are sufficient to reduce attrition due to bursar holds and generally cost less than they recoup in tuition
- Consider making grants contingent on good academic standing and conduct

2

Add delayed payment as forgiveness factor

- Reduce the bursar hold threshold amount for students with long-overdue fees
- Example policy:
  - Less than $2: no hold applied
  - $100 or more, more than 30 days past due: hold applied
  - $2 to $100, more than 60 days past due: hold applied

3

Encourage student use of financial literacy resources

- Include financial literacy resource information in initial email to students with outstanding bursar fees
- Recommend or require online financial literacy classes for students given emergency grants to resolve holds

Bursar Holds (cont.)

Student Outreach and Escalation Process Flowchart

1 Automatic Email to All Students with Outstanding Bursar Fees

- Two weeks before registration period
- Resolve any holds where primary issue was student awareness
- Link to online resources: FAFSA guide, budgeting help, work study

Use positive language and student's first name:
"Dear [NAME],

I noticed you have an unpaid fee of $27.50 for overdue library books. I want to help you get this hold resolved and make sure you're able to register for classes next fall. […]

If you aren't sure how to renew your FAFSA for next year, you can visit our website […]

If you have any more questions or concerns, feel free to schedule a meeting with me and we can figure out a plan to pay your fee on time.

Have a great week!

[NAME]

Your Academic Advisor"

2 Text and/or Call Unresponsive Students

- Students more likely to respond to personal text or phone call than automated email
- One staff member needed for every 200-300 students, can be student workers or other paraprofessionals

Ask questions to determine student needs:

- Were you aware of this fee? What is the best way to get in touch with you in the future?
- Did you file a FAFSA form this year?
- Do you know about our scholarship options for students in your major?
- Did you know that we provide on-campus work study opportunities for students trying to balance a job with their studies?
- Would you like to speak with someone in our Financial Aid office?

3 Refer Students with Complex Needs to Financial Aid Office

- Provide mini-grants or emergency loans to students unable to afford fee
- Open office hours when any students with outstanding payments or questions can meet with staff
- Share work-study and scholarship options with students
- Waive registration hold if appropriate

Example Micro-scholarship Policy

The financial aid office has the authority to distribute emergency micro-scholarships to students with urgent financial issues. These scholarships are treated as grant funds and do not need to be repaid.

- $1,000 or less
- Funded by small alumni donations
- Distributed on a case-by-case basis, usually for emergency relief of bursar holds
- Students who receive a scholarship participate in a brief online financial literacy course
- Scholarships are contingent on good financial aid and conduct. The number of scholarships a student has previously received will be considered

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Multi-term Registration

Allow and Encourage Students to Register for a Full Year of Courses at a Time

Understanding the Problem

Traditionally, students register for each term's courses at the end of the previous term. When students only register for one term at a time, it is easier to stop or drop out, and harder to account in advance for scheduling needs. It is also more difficult for institutions to predict course enrollment and ensure that section offerings reflect student demand. Progressive institutions are beginning to allow students to register for courses a full year in advance, encouraging them to plan ahead. Multi-term registration can significantly improve retention rates by encouraging students to plan around long-term degree progress, rather than simply next-term convenience.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Allow students to register for courses one term at a time, excluding intercession

- Does not encourage students to plan for the long term
- More difficult for faculty and administrators to predict needed classroom capacity in advance

Best Practice ✔

Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once

- Students can plan ahead for conflicts such as off-campus work or study abroad
- Reopen registration at the beginning of each term so that students can make changes

Too Strict ✖

Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans

- Significant strain on faculty, facilities planners, and registration systems
- Predictive data several years out is likely not robust and will not impact section planning choices

Considerations for Implementation

1

Pre-register students for sequential courses

- Automatically registering students for the next course in a sequence helps expedite the process
- High number of pre-registrations may highlight opportunity to reduce unnecessary three-semester course sequences

2

Reserve seats for incoming first-year students

- Multi-term registration may reduce the number of seats available to incoming first-year and transfer students
- Institutions transitioning to multi-term registration must ensure seats are reserved in common first-year courses before opening registration

3

Use data to predict section and facilities needs

- Early registration information can help predict potential high- or low-enrollment sections
- Data could be used to assign an additional instructor or find a larger classroom for courses that fill up one or two terms in advance

Multi-term Registration (cont.)

Advice on Implementation From Registration Experts

Building the Schedule

Timely Schedule Availability

- Schedules built three weeks before registration begins
- Cleveland State found little impact on faculty workload due to two-term scheduling

Prioritizing Course Offerings

- Departments encouraged to schedule courses that meet basic scheduling needs first
- Registrar’s office maintains targets for essential course offerings

Increasing Student Adoption

Multi-term as Default Option

- Show all available terms on main registration page to “nudge” students toward participation
- Alter language to reinforce year-long planning

Targeted Email Outreach

- Send monthly awareness emails throughout summer and fall to students who haven’t registered for additional terms

Improving Predictive Capacity

Post-requisite Audits

Audit prerequisite course progress at critical points throughout the term to reduce artificial post-requisite demand:

- Add/drop deadline
- Withdrawal deadline
- End of term

Wait lists as Forecasting Tool

Use wait lists to:

- Dynamically adjust section enrollment
- Justify additional sections
- Forecast need for additional instructors

Managing the Wait List

Responding to Seat Openings

- 24 hour window to take advantage of open seats
- If a new section of a course is opened up at a different time, a student is moved to the new wait list but also kept on the original wait list

Prerequisite Checking

- Students removed from wait lists if course prerequisite requirements not met
- Prerequisite checking is time-consuming but not substantially different from single-term registration process

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Course Wait Lists

Track Registration Wait Lists and Override Course Caps for Students in Need

Understanding the Problem

"Bottleneck" courses required for popular degree programs and general education requirements are frequently over-enrolled, causing students who need these requirements in order to graduate or apply to a selective major to delay their graduation or major declaration. Course wait list functionality allows faculty to review which courses are popular and provides a "first-come, first-served" method for reassigning seats to students that want them. However, wait lists do not typically distinguish between students with an urgent need for a required course and students who could wait another term to take the course. In order to keep students on track to graduate, faculty and academic units need access to detailed wait list data that allows them to make informed decisions about when to override enrollment caps or expand section offerings.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Create a new section any time a course hits 100% fill rate to accommodate demand

- Strains institutional capacity to provide courses
- Does not account for registration cancellations after courses begin

Best Practice

Override registration caps for some students until wait list reaches enrollment minimum

- Ensure that students with urgent degree requirements are granted seats in over-enrolled courses
- Create new sections when wait list length is equal to course enrollment minimum

Too Strict

Do not allow students to register for courses after courses reach capacity

- Leaves many classrooms underutilized after later cancellations
- Delays graduation for students competing for seats in bottleneck courses

Considerations for Implementation

1

Provide early online registration for new students

- New students compete for seats in popular courses with returners who registered a term or more earlier
- Reduce competition by providing an online option, reviewed later by advisors

2

Assign instructors to "shadow" sections of bottleneck courses

- If a course is cancelled due to low enrollment, instructors can be reassigned to a new high-enrollment course section
- Allow instructors to bypass this reassignment through a dean waiver
- Online sections can also mitigate space concerns

3

Do not impose a cap on course wait list size

- Course wait lists provide valuable information on the size of demand for a course
- Uncapped wait lists should be paired with restrictions on how many wait lists students can add themselves too

Course Wait Lists (cont.)

Priority Registration and Section Expansion Process Map

Missed Milestones

Students who have already missed a course designated as a “milestone” in their academic program are the most important population to target for priority registration.

1 Give Priority Registration — *Before spring registration period*

Super-Seniors

Students who have already completed over 120 credit-hours (or four years of instruction) are an ideal target for seat cap overrides to ensure quick graduation.

Re-enrolled Students

Re-enrolled students who did not register during the scheduled period often need seat cap overrides in order to be placed in required courses they have missed.

2 Override Seat Cap — *After spring registration period*

Transfer Students

Transfer students starting in the fall can register early through an online orientation module to minimize seat competition with returning students.

3 Provide Pre-term Registration Option — *Before fall registration period*

Over-Filled Wait List

When wait list size reaches minimum section size, add a new section of the course, taught by a faculty member whose scheduled class did not meet the minimum.

4 Open Additional Course Section — *After fall registration period*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Early Academic Alerts

Require Faculty to Flag Signs of Student Risk, but With Flexible Parameters

Understanding the Problem

Since instructors have more day-to-day contact with students than anyone else at a university, they can be leveraged to submit "early warning" alerts to advisors and student support services if a student is struggling with academic or other issues in the classroom. While these systems are an effective way to proactively reach out to students in need and offer support, they do rely on extensive faculty adoption, especially in high-enrollment, high-failure first-year courses. Faculty may be resistant to use these systems if they have no control over alert system parameters and cannot use their expertise to determine an appropriate midterm assessment deadline or "at-risk" grade threshold. Due to these concerns, advisors and support services may lose a critical opportunity to learn about student risk factors before students drop out.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades

- Misses out on opportunity to intervene with some students at risk of attrition
- Faculty may avoid submitting alerts, limiting usefulness of early warning systems

Best Practice

Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe

- Midterm deadline and "at-risk" grade threshold must be defined at the start of the term
- Faculty choose and prioritize resources recommended to students based on risk type

Too Strict

Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline

- Risks losing faculty buy-in over perception of top-down mandate or mistrust of students
- May create artificial perception that successful students are at risk

Considerations for Implementation

1

Encourage formative assessment before drop date

- Midterm/assessment grades are valuable to advisors as early performance indicators
- Allowing students to assess their performance early prevents unnecessary repeats and late withdrawals
- Faculty may set their own assessment date within a range

2

Permit and encourage assistants to submit alerts

- Teaching assistants and resident assistants also have frequent contact with students and can submit alerts
- Early alerts can be included in assistant job descriptions to normalize compliance

3

Emphasize next steps, not alert status

- Students may view alerts as punitive if messaging centers around student risk status
- Alert messaging should focus on resources available to students and suggested actions for students to improve their grades

Early Academic Alerts (cont.)

Best Practices for Designing Early Alert Systems for Faculty Engagement

Make it Simple

Single Referral

Faculty given option to suggest specific response, but able to send all alerts to single office

Target High-Risk Courses and Students

Focus compliance efforts at highest-impact populations

All-Inclusive

Single system for logging academic, attendance, and behavioral alerts

Includes Assistants

Train graduate and teaching assistants to ensure coverage of introductory course sections

Address Faculty Concerns

Student Privacy

Faculty, advisors, RAs, and support staff able to submit alerts, but full access limited

Positive Messaging

Students encouraged to take clear action steps, rather than simply alerted of risk

Follow-up

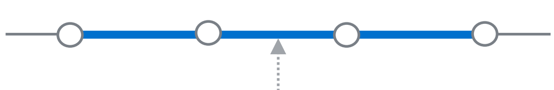
Faculty informed of alert receipt, as well as progress and resolution of cases

Flexible Faculty Role

Faculty able to decide whether and how to get involved with student issues

Instructor-Specific Time Window and Grade Scale Improve Adoption

Faculty asked to determine best early assessment point



Typical: Standard early grade deadline

Faculty determine examination and grade that constitutes "on track"

Typical: Single grade threshold for institution

Faculty able to choose and prioritize resources sent to students

1. Office hours
2. Supplementary instruction
3. Tutoring center
4. Departmental resource

– *Typical: Early warning office dictates response*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Course Repeats

Limit the Number of Times a Student Can Repeat a Course Without Penalty

Understanding the Problem

Students who repeat a course two or more times are significantly less likely to graduate than their peers, because they are kept from progressing on to more advanced courses, and must spend multiple terms on the same material. These students are often overlooked by advisors if institutional policy allows them to indefinitely repeat courses. However, with appropriate intervention, students may be able to achieve passing grades in high-failure courses through use of tutoring and academic support resources. Advisors can also support students in revising degree maps to avoid excessive repeats, either by switching majors or substituting a different course.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions

- Causes students to accumulate excess credits and pay excessive tuition
- Prevents advisors from identifying poor-fit majors

Best Practice

Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat

- Advisors can ensure that students are aware of academic support resources
- Advisors could suggest a different course or major as an alternative, but not mandatory

Too Strict

Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements

- Requires students to take remedial courses or change major/drop out
- Does not account for uncontrollable D/F grades due to personal reasons

Considerations for Implementation

1

Limit withdrawals allowed per student and per term

- Allowing a limited number of course withdrawals per term can decrease unnecessary repeats without getting students off track
- Example policy:
  - One withdrawal per term
  - Five total withdrawals allowed
  - Further withdrawals require waiver signed by dean

2

Calculate GPA based on most recent repeat grade

- Averaging grades in repeated courses disadvantages students who improve significantly after first year
- Use most recent grade for GPA and prerequisite calculation
- All grades should appear on transcripts to accurately reflect students' experiences

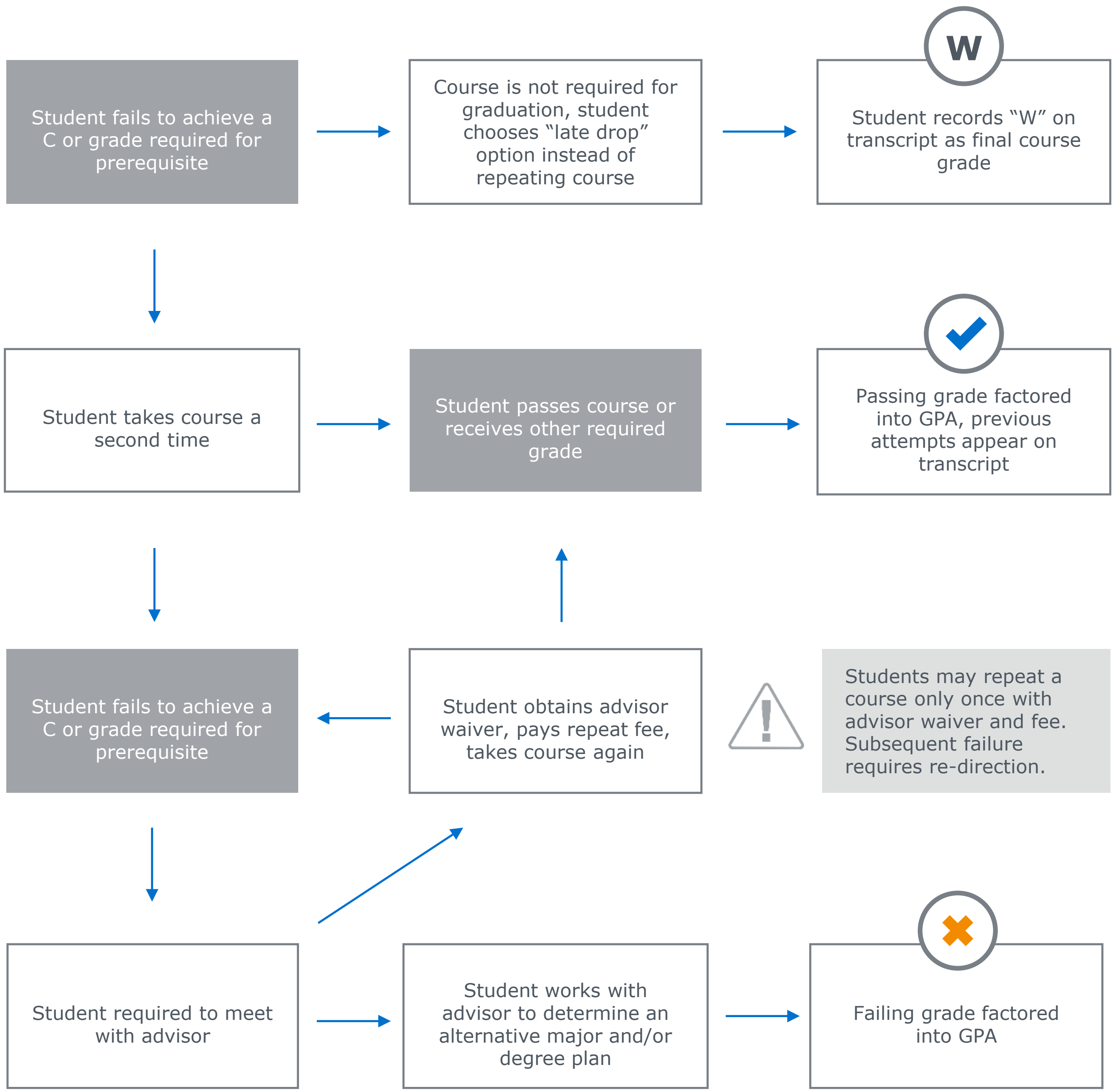
3

Institute late drop policy to reduce unnecessary repeats

- Allowing students to withdraw from one course at any time in the term can reduce unnecessary repeats to repair GPA after a failed course
- Students who change their major or degree plan to avoid a particular requirement have no incentive to take up a seat in the course

Course Repeats (cont.)

Course Repeat Process Map



See Academic Probation and Dismissal policy for more information

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Course and Institutional Withdrawal

Inform Students of Consequences and Resources Upon Withdrawal Request

Understanding the Problem

Preventable withdrawals are a critical opportunity for institutions to raise retention and graduation rates and ensure that students progress toward timely graduation. If it is too simple for students to withdraw from one or all courses, students may not take time to reflect on the consequences of withdrawal or take advantage of campus resources that can help them persist. Students may be unaware of academic support resources like tutoring that can help them improve grades, personal and family health options available on campus, work study opportunities, and/or major and career advising resources. Creating a common process for all student withdrawals provides an opportunity to proactively connect students with these resources and encourage them to consider all available options before deciding to withdraw.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction

- Fails to take advantage of critical intervention opportunity
- Does not differentiate between different types of student needs

Best Practice

Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal

- Survey responses trigger prompts about resources specific to student's needs
- Discourages unnecessary transfer-out or drop-out

Too Strict

Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal

- Does not account for necessary withdrawals
- May be overly time-consuming for advisors, faculty/deans, or other support offices

Considerations for Implementation

1

Direct withdrawing students to meet with their advisors

- Advisors can use survey data to help students develop a personalized plan to complete their degrees at the institution
- Advisors are aware of the breadth of resources available on campus and can recommend support offices to students

2

Simplify withdrawals for necessary personal reasons

- Permit students to withdraw for health or family reasons without encountering bureaucratic roadblocks
- Identify students with necessary reasons for transfer-out (e.g. desired major not offered) and allow these students to transfer seamlessly

3

Use data to better predict student attrition risk

- Common student selections in withdrawal survey suggest areas for resource expansion
- Student characteristics can help predict drop-out risk before students withdraw
- Student feedback from exit surveys can be used to improve withdrawal survey options and process

Course and Institutional Withdrawal (cont.)

Student-Facing Survey Module With Customized Recommendations

PennState

Withdrawal survey module accessible through Penn State's ELion student dashboard

1. **Student confirms desire to withdraw from institution**
   - Module provides definition of withdrawal and distinction from course drop, leave of absence

2. **Student acknowledges withdrawal consequences**
   - Students must view and sign off on the above consequences to continue with a withdrawal
   - Also includes resources for learning consequences to veteran benefits, housing and dining options, financial aid

3. **Student selects one or more withdrawal reason(s)**
   - Students can choose from 22 academic, personal, and other reasons for withdrawing
   - Students select a primary reason and any number of secondary reasons

4. **Withdrawal module displays targeted recommendations**
   - Based on selected withdrawal reason(s), students are given alternatives to withdrawal
   - Tone of messages is positive and encouraging

5. **Student confirms withdrawal decision**
   - Students must review consequences and alternatives one additional time before processing institutional withdrawal request

Sample Withdrawal Implications

- **Grades:** You will receive 'W' grade symbols for current semester courses.
- **Health Insurance:** You may become ineligible for health insurance benefits. You should contact your insurance company before withdrawing.
- **Financial Aid:** If you are receiving financial aid, you may lose some or all of your grants, loans or scholarships. You should contact the Office of Student Aid before withdrawing.
- **Previous Semester Courses:** Courses from previous semesters with deferred grades 'DF', no grades 'NG' or Research 'R' will not be affected by a withdrawal for the current semester.

Sample Withdrawal Reasons

Students will be given personalized recommendations based on the selected reasons.

- **Academic Risk:**
  - Failed a major assignment
  - Poor overall grade in course
  - Didn't meet conditions for major acceptance
- **Study and Time Management Skills**
  - Overwhelmed by course workload
  - Can't balance class with job schedule
  - Struggling with completing assignments
- **Personal or Family Health Concerns**
  - Child care needs
  - Personal or family illness
  - Feeling homesick
  - Feeling depressed or unmotivated
- **Major and Career Planning**
  - Major not a good fit
  - Unsure about career
  - Desired major not offered at institution
- **Low Campus Engagement**
  - Considering transferring to a new institution
  - Not sufficiently challenged
  - Feeling bored or socially disconnected

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Academic Probation and Dismissal

Design Probation and Dismissal Policies to Support Students With Improving GPA

Understanding the Problem

Students on academic probation or academic dismissal are statistically unlikely to graduate within six years. It is costly both for institutions to invest in supporting these students and for students to continue at an institution where they show poor academic performance. However, this trend is reversed for students who show improved academic performance from term to term. Students who are able to complete a degree at a two-year institution after being dismissed also represent an opportunity for institutions to increase their graduation rates, as these students have demonstrated ability to complete a degree and will also only take two years to graduate if taking a full course load. Policies should support and encourage these students to return to the institution.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient (✖)

Allow students to remain on probation indefinitely, regardless of improvement

- Students whose GPA does not improve are unlikely to complete at the institution
- May increase cost to students

Best Practice (✔)

Require students on probation to reverse GPA trend to continue at the institution

- Positive GPA trend indicates likelihood of graduation
- "Clean slate" GPA policies allow students to continue their studies at a two-year institution before returning

Too Strict (✖)

Dismiss students if they fail to improve academic standing after one probationary term

- Reduces institution's overall graduation rate
- Discourages students from using probation-specific resources

Considerations for Implementation

1

Allow dismissed students to take classes at any college

- 2-year degree transfer agreements should include ability to complete other needed credits at 4-year and/or distance learning institutions
- Success at another 2- or 4-year institution is a predictor of completion at the original institution

2

Focus on advising students returning from probation

- These student populations will likely need more advisor attention than other transfer students
- Advisors should focus on degree pathing as well as improving study skills, confidence, and tenacity

3

Analyze major vs. general education GPA

- Students with high performance in general education and low performance in major classes should be advised to switch majors rather than withdraw
- Advisors can target subject areas for remedial support (e.g. students with low GPA in math-heavy courses)

Academic Probation and Dismissal (cont.)

Probation and Dismissal Process Map and Implementation Guidance

Academic Probation

- Student GPA <2.0
- Student receives increased advisor monitoring, success coaching if available

Failing grades only occurred within major; general education GPA > 2.0

- Remove probationary status on condition that student changes major
- Require advisor approval for further major changes

Student GPA > 2.0 after one semester on probation

- Remove probationary status

Student GPA still <2.0 but shows positive GPA trend

- >2.0 in all classes during one term may not overcome low overall GPA
- Student must take full course load
- Student remains on probation

After three semesters

Student is unable to improve GPA

Academic Dismissal

- Conditions of probation not met
- Student asked to leave the institution

Student transfers to 2-year institution and completes AA

- Treat student as 2-year transfer
- Student may choose to retain previously earned GPA or start again with a "blank" GPA and not take credits earned at 4-year institution
- Advisors should monitor these students more closely

Student returns to the institution after three or more years

- Treat student as new nontraditional learner
- Student can keep all credit from A/B/C grades earned, "clear" D/F

Allow dean or chair to waive probation/ dismissal conditions

- Poor academic performance may be due to personal circumstances out of student's control
- Academic units likely to err on the side of strictness, may exercise discretion in re-admitting a student who does not meet GPA requirements

Probation and dismissal policies may be determined at state system level

- Many state systems have system-level "blank slate" policies for GPA of students returning to 4-year institution after completing 2-year degree

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Communications

Improve Student Experience Through Central Oversight of Email Messages

Understanding the Problem

Virtually 100% of university offices rely on email as their primary communication channel, yet despite their heavy use of the internet, students often miss out on important email messages. In a recent survey conducted by Bowling Green State University, 72% of students self-reported that they treat emails from student organizations as spam. More than half said they do not always read emails from their university or academic department, and more than a third do not always read emails from their advisors. The overwhelming amount of email students receive means students may miss critical reminders, especially if university offices fail to incorporate communications best practices. When a message about a bursar hold, registration deadline, or urgent advising appointment is indistinguishable from spam, a break in communications can disrupt student progress.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Allow faculty and staff to communicate with all students as frequently as desired

- Students feel overwhelmed by frequency of communications
- Students can't distinguish high-priority or urgent communications from other messages

Best Practice ✔

Centrally coordinate and schedule messages to large numbers of students

- A visible central schedule helps avoid overlap between important scheduled messages
- A "gatekeeper" for messages to 200+ students helps avoid overuse of bulk email

Too Strict ✖

Require all student communications to come from one central office

- Messaging lacks the perspective of offices or departments closest to the content
- Wastes time on oversight of messages to a small subset of students

Considerations for Implementation

1

Use a unique template to flag messages as urgent

- Emails with a different look and feel help students prioritize critical messages (weather-related closures, critical deadlines, etc.)
- Students are also open to receiving text messages for truly urgent items

2

Publicize guidelines for student communication

- As part of the email submission process, faculty and staff should view a list of email best practices and rules (anti-spam policies, security, etc.)
- Central guidelines promote transparency about gatekeeper decisions

3

Streamline pre-enrollment messages to new students

- Students often receive hundreds of emails before they even arrive on campus
- Centrally-coordinated messages and clear "to-do" checklists simplify the onboarding process

Source: Ashley Smith, "Up Front for Retention," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 24, 2017; Bowling Green State University Survey, Presented at the 2016 Information and Telecommunications Education and Research Association Conference; Rhonda Kitch, "Best Practices for Communicating Critical Messages: From a Registrar's Office to Traditional-aged College Students," A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the North Dakota State University of Agriculture and Applied Science, March 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Communications (cont.)

Best Practices for Effective Student Communication

Writing Subject Lines that Encourage Students to Click

Mixpanel Analysis of 85,637 Subject Lines

13.5% Benchmark open rate for 1.7 billion emails

Change in Open Rate mixpanel

+1.5%	Subject line less than 30 characters
-0.6%	Subject line more than 30 characters
+1.7%	Subject line includes a "?"
+7.5%	Subject line includes "How to…"

Catchy	Oops—you missed your registration deadline!
Direct	Concerned about your midterm grades
Urgent	URGENT: Your academic plan
Authoritative	Next steps to get you back on track
Conversational	Let's chat about Chemistry
Mysterious	You qualify for a new program!
Guiding	How to improve your GPA at the Tutoring Center
Action-oriented	Schedule some time with me this week
Questioning	Is there a reason you haven't registered yet?

Adapted from Advisory Board's Internal Guidelines

Yes, Today's Students Still Use Email:

#1 ranked communication method by students is email

40% of students say texts from colleges are excessive

Writing for Clarity, Empathy, and a Student-Centered Focus

Impersonal Copy

"Whitehouse University cares about your success and offers a number of resources for students in need of additional support. Students have found the tutoring center to be critical in improving their GPA for admission into certain selective programs."

Student-Centered Copy

"I care about your success and noticed that your math midterm grade is not up to standards for the Business School, which you want to apply for next semester. You should schedule an appointment with the tutoring center."

50% Increase in response rate (Royall recruitment campaign)

- **Reduce multisyllabic words**
  "Exempted" → "Do not need to"
- **Remove passive voice**
  "If you are contacted by your advisor" → "If your advisor contacts you"
- **Translate jargon**
  "Non-credit-bearing" → "Does not count for credit"
- **Ensure readability**
  The Gunning Fog Index is an online tool to assess the grade-level of a given text

Source: Megahan, J. "Why do people open emails?" Mixpanel Blog. July 2016; Royall and Company University Research Partners, "Communication Preferences: How to reach the next generation of college-bound students," Fall 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Aid Renewal

Remind Students to Renew Financial Aid with Student-Friendly Nudges

Understanding the Problem

Among students who leave college without intent to transfer, finances and work are students' most commonly cited reasons for stopping out. Yet a significant portion of financial aid is left on the table every year. More than $2.9 billion of federal financial aid goes unclaimed each year due to incomplete FAFSA applications, and 15-20% of Pell Grant recipients in good academic standing do not successfully refile their FAFSA. Often, students do not even know they need to refile their FAFSA past the first year. When they do, they often find the process opaque and overly complex. Jargon (is a "priority deadline" the same as a regular deadline?) and cumbersome financial forms discourage students from refiling. And they may question whether college is really right for them: Pell-eligible sophomores who fail to refile are 28% more likely to withdraw.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require students to refile financial aid forms after the first year

- Assumes students will know if they need to refile—when many are completely uncertain
- Infrequent, non-urgent reminders will not reach the neediest students

Best Practice

Send a series of escalating "nudges" reminding students to refile financial aid forms

- Clear, student-friendly messages communicate urgency and walk students through refile process
- Weekly reminders to eligible students who do not refile ensure a that missed email need not equal financial attrition

Too Strict

Use registration holds to require students to refile financial aid forms

- Blocks degree progress for students with legitimate reasons for delaying refile
- The connection between financial aid and registration is unclear and may confuse students

Considerations for Implementation

1

Use messaging to demystify and normalize federal aid

- Many students do not know that a large portion of their peers receive federal aid and may feel shame or confusion
- Facts about how many students receive federal aid reduce student anxiety and create gentle peer pressure to refile

2

Send refile reminders to parents of eligible students

- The FAFSA form requires significant information about parental finances
- Reminding parents keeps lines of communication open between students and their families and encourages parents to remind students

3

Draft action-oriented subject lines to increase click-through

- Students are more likely to open an email that uses personalized language, asks a question, or features a surprising data point
- Marking email as urgent helps students prioritize aid renewal

Source: ideas42, "Nudging for Success: Using behavioral science to improve the postsecondary journey," June 2016; Matross, R. & Huesman, R., "Why Did They Leave?", University of Minnesota; EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Aid Renewal (cont.)

The Anatomy of an Effective Email Nudge

Arizona State University, working together with the non-profit behavioral science organization **ideas42**, put together a series of eight weekly student aid renewal reminders. These reminder emails were designed to be student-friendly and used behavioral research from in and outside the higher education domain to encourage students to read the content and follow its recommendations. The email message below is one example.

8 messages across 8 weeks

***Sample Email:* FAFSA Myths Debunked**

Hi Alissa,

The FAFSA is now available. With FAFSA Mythbusters, we debunk three common myths and help you stay on track for the March 1 priority deadline. It could mean thousands more dollars in your financial aid package.

Myth #1: Most students don't qualify for financial aid.	**Fact #1:** Over 80% of students at ASU receive financial aid.
Myth #2: You only have to file the FAFSA once for college.	**Fact #2:** You must refile the FAFSA every year to continue receiving aid.
Myth #3: Your financial aid is always available to you, regardless of when you apply for it.	**Fact #3:** Apply by the priority deadline to get all the money you're eligible for. On average, students who apply before then get twice the amount of aid!

Submit your application by the Sunday March 1 priority deadline.
Here's what you need to do now:

[√] Get ASU's college code—it's 001081

[ ] **Retrieve your PIN**

[ ] **Figure out** if you need your parents' financial information

Sincerely,
Melissa Pizzo
Executive Director, Financial Aid and Scholarship Service

Dispel **common misconceptions**

Drill in on the **task** at hand

Link to relevant resources so students don't have to hunt for them

Send from a **specific person** so students feel comfortable responding

This email starts by dispelling common misconceptions about the FAFSA, the first being that most students don not use financial aid, when most do—a tactic known as "social norming." This message also includes a call to action, emphasizing the priority deadline, and breaks the process down into easily-accomplishable tasks rather than one large, difficult undertaking. It encourages students to talk with their parents about required financial information, and some of the other emails sent to Arizona State students include charts and graphs to help students understand the process.

As a result of the eight-week campaign, Arizona State students were 72% more likely to refile before the priority deadline (by which they would receive the maximum funding amount) if they and their parents both received the email nudges. They also received higher aid packages: between $236 and $643 more than students who did not receive nudges.

Source: ideas42, "Nudging for Success: Using behavioral science to improve the postsecondary journey," June 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

Non-registered Students

Contact Students who Fail to Register for Classes After Registration Period Ends

Understanding the Problem

Few institutions make a concerted effort to compare semester-to-semester registration data, build a list of students that registered for zero classes, and reach out to those students to determine why they did not re-register. This population represents an often-missed chance for institutions to improve term-to-term retention. Students fail to register for preventable reasons, whether simple (a missed registration deadline) or more complex (a work conflict or personal concern). If these students are connected with campus resources soon after registration deadlines, they may be able to continue on to the next term with little interruption.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term

- Allows students to effectively withdraw without completing the official process
- Limits support for students who need registration help

Best Practice

Call students who fail to register before the deadline for unexplained reasons

- Recoup retention loss from students with easily-resolved registration concerns
- Students with more complex issues can be referred to advising or other campus support services

Too Strict

Automatically register students for courses using a prescriptive degree plan

- Does not allow for student choice or independence
- Creates artificial perception of course enrollment counts
- Difficult to implement in registration system

Considerations for Implementation

1

Employ student workers for initial outreach

- Student workers or other entry-level staff can make first inquiry calls to students
- One worker can contact up to 200-300 students
- Many cases are easily resolved by student workers (e.g. student was not aware of registration deadline)

2

Reach out to students missing other critical deadlines

- Non-registration and similar behaviors serve as a proxy for grit, indicating potential risk to persistence
- Example campaigns include students who did not renew the FAFSA, new students who did not pick up an ID card at orientation

3

Plan across units for year-round student monitoring

- Coordinate with staff across advising units to address specific at-risk student behaviors at appropriate times in the year
- Units can share materials, outreach strategies, student caseloads if uneven across different departments

Non-registered Students (cont.)

Re-enrollment Escalation Process Map

1 Nudge Students to Complete Required Tasks

Send a series of email and/or text reminders to students about registration deadlines

Students Do Eventually Respond to Email

35% of incoming students make tuition deposits after already receiving five email reminders

Students Prefer Text for Urgent Reminders

64% of surveyed HS students would want universities to text them about an application deadline

Example Email Nudge

> *Hi Jane,*
>
> *As we are nearing the end of Spring Term, I noticed that you are not registered for any Fall Term courses. I wanted to remind you that the deadline for Fall Registration is coming up in two weeks, so you should register now to get your first-choice classes!*
>
> *As a reminder, you can register online at this link and you can pick up to five classes to take next term. If you have any questions about registration, contact…*

2 Resolve Simple Student Issues

Many unregistered students just have quick questions about the registration system or process

PROBLEM: Phone outreach often can be the rate-limiting step in campaigns

- Outreach lists can be prohibitively long
- Several calls may be needed before first connection
- Advisor time better used on more complex tasks

SOLUTION: Employ student success call center to resolve simple issues and help students register

6-11	**$8.15**	**8**
Student workers	Hourly pay rate	Avg. hours per week

3 Escalate Complex Cases to Professionals

- "My grades are bad and I'm scared about what will happen if I go on academic probation." → **Success Coach**
- "I decided I want to be a social worker and now I'm not sure if a Psychology major is right for me." → **Academic and Career Advising**
- "I can't afford tuition anymore. I need to focus on working this semester so I can pay for college." → **Financial Aid**
- "I saw there were three different versions of Spanish Literature 303 and I can't tell which one will let me read more works by Cervantes." → **Academic Department/ Faculty Mentor**
- "Just thinking about signing up for another term makes me feel anxious. College is overwhelming." → **Student Wellness/Mental Health Counseling**

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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