ARTS Update: Pieces of the PLU Student Departure Puzzle

The varied reasons why students enroll in our university and leave before completing their degrees constitute a complex phenomenon that must be assessed from multiple angles. Based upon the 2014 recommendations of the PLU Strategic Enrollment Management Advisory Committee (SEMAC), the Admission and Retention of Students (ARTS) Committee has been investigating current PLU practices and policies that aim to improve the persistence of undergraduate students and, in consequence, increase retention rate metrics. We have drafted 16 “Puzzle Pieces” to help direct institutional focus and policy development with regard to student persistence and retention rates. It is clear that the solution to “the puzzle” is unique to any given college or university and must be discerned in the context of our own campus culture, community, and resources. We hope to gather feedback via discussions, campus forums, focus groups, and surveys in order to finalize our recommendations in Spring 2015.

### A SUCCESSFUL START

1) Admissions criteria: math and language entrance requirements  
2) Underprepared students: Summer Academy pilot program  
3) Transfer students: unique needs and transition issues  
4) Orientation: review of orientation practices for first year and transfer students  
5) First-Year Experience Program (FYEP)

### THE CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

6) “Touchpoints”: linking students with their academic advisors  
7) General Education as a tool in developing student persistence  
8) Fostering an “academic home” for majors within departments/schools/programs  
9) Major declaration: timeline and ritual as a tool for community-building  
10) “Do I fit here?” - How do our curriculum and co-curriculum impart sense of belonging?

### PAVING A PATH TO GRADUATION

11) Departure risk assessment: student tracking and intervention strategies  
12) Academic support centers and maximizing their impact on student success  
13) “Persistence coaching” for students in crisis or other special circumstances  
14) Rethinking Midterm Warnings: earlier alerts for struggling students  
15) Multi-year scheduling for planning coherent pathways to a degree  
16) Financial aid awareness & student services counselors: aid eligibility dashboard

Informal Discussion on ARTS Recommendations:

6) “Touchpoints”: linking students with their academic advisors
We recommend that all students obtain Registration Access Codes from their academic advisors before registering for classes each term.

- Currently only students with fewer than 60 completed credit hours are required to use Registration Access Codes.
- Access codes encourage communication between students and their academic advisors.
- Advising of upper division students takes a variety of forms (individual, group, etc.).
- New transfer students and Running Start students with 60+ credit hours can currently register without input from their academic advisor.
- Mode of distribution of access codes would be up to discretion of academic advisors.

Discussion Questions: For those who already advise juniors and seniors, what strategies have you found that are effective given your overall number of advisees? Do you think requiring access codes will be an effective tool in improving retention and guiding students to graduation in a timely manner?

14) Rethinking Midterm Warnings: earlier alerts for struggling students

We recommend that an earlier intervention strategy be piloted, a “Fall Alert” and “Spring Alert”, no later than Week 6 of a Fall or Spring semester.

- Currently, Midterm Warnings occur by Week 8, and student notification and intervention does not happen until Weeks 10-11.
- An earlier “Alert” would not have to be linked to a letter grade and could be based on assignment participation, attendance, participation, etc. A web-based method will be investigated to streamline administration and logistics of the Alerts.
- Earlier notification of students and advisors will allow for earlier academic success intervention strategies and better tracking of students in difficulty.

Discussion Questions: What should be the timing of an Alert: Week 4, 5, or 6? How do we encourage greater participation by faculty members in completing Alerts? What should be the consequence of a student receiving an Alert, and what intervention strategies should be required for these students?