Undergraduate Retention Initiatives

Whitacre College of Engineering

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Introduction

Successful retention programs encompass virtually everything an institution does to improve the quality of student life and learning. Quality can be defined as that set of attributes of an educational program or service that consistently exceeds student expectations within specifically defined institutional-determined standards and/or criteria of performance. Practically speaking, the evidence of effective programs is clear, namely that the route to successful retention lies in those programs that ensure from the very onset of student contact with the institution; that entering students are integrated with teaching/learning processes of the college; and that students acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become successful learners in that community.

To better understand each college’s approaches to supporting student success, the Provost issued a request for the inventory of college-based retention and success initiatives. In conjunction with the larger institution-wide report, this extract reports only the information submitted provided by the Whitacre College of Engineering.

Current Structure/Approach

− The college graduates approximately 40% after six years. This rate of graduation is very low for an engineering college that aspires to the kind of distinction TTU hopes for.
− Programs within the college are generally too long, and are losing too many students in the process.
− Strategies to prevent academic attrition long-term:
  o Increasing the selectivity of students admitted to the college
  o implementing strategies to encourage persistence
  o continue to enroll students through the pre-engineering program and identify academic weaknesses early
  o focus on increasing graduate students
  o identifying students in the early
  o an unofficial survey was conducted in the college, revealing that students do not leave because of financial distress-survey revealed that students indicated their reasons for leaving the college having to do with high challenge course work.
Initiatives

− Obligating graduate students with generous support packages to offer approximately 10 hours annually as tutors. Tutoring is critical to the long-term retention strategy of the colleges.
− The college is interested in hiring a full-time set of tutors that are properly trained for the type of courses and students seen by those in the engineering college.

Support Needed

− The college would be well assisted by central administration and helping to hire additional minority and women faculty.
− Retention is believed to be tied to their support system, which currently does not exist for first-generation, low income, minority, and women students.
− Assist the college in focusing its growth at the graduate, and not the undergraduate level.
− Assist by developing assessment and metrics to examine which retention strategies are proving effective, and which are not.