Undergraduate Retention Initiatives

College of Human Sciences

Office of the Provost
Texas Tech University
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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 College of Human Sciences.

Current Structure/Approach
The college is aware of the need to systemically and strategically focus its centralized retention efforts and activities. Moreover, it is taking substantive action to accomplish this, beginning with the structure and responsibilities of its Student Services personnel. The College of Human Sciences (COHS) has restructured the Student Services organizational chart to place a higher emphasis on student engagement and retention. To provide a synergistic approach to student services, the new organizational structure incorporates a team methodology with leaders in the areas of 1) Entering Freshmen Recruitment, 2) Transfer Student Recruitment, 3) Academic Advising, and 4) Student Engagement and Retention. Specifically, this recent team-oriented reorganization has been manifested in the following ways:

− Established an Office of Student Recruitment, Engagement, and Retention
− Repurposed personnel to focus on engagement and retention as a strategic priority – Director of Student Engagement and Retention
− Bifurcated recruitment responsibilities into Entering Freshmen and Transfer Student Recruiting – redirected funds to support a new Transfer Student Recruitment Unit Coordinator and converted the other recruiter to serve as Entering Freshmen Recruitment Unit Coordinator
− Restructured Academic Advising Office
  o Reclassified 3 Academic Advisors as Senior Academic Advisors (exempt) with additional responsibilities related to recruitment, student employee development, and student recognition

Beyond these structural changes, the college is investigating and embarking on approaches that accomplish the following:

− Focus retention efforts on students at risk of attrition.
− Explore methods of attracting external experts on retention and persistence to speak to their college and further train their staff.
− Support its academic advisors and their interest in, and attendance of, NACADA.
− Explore how to take advantage of advising professional development, including the Advising Academy and other offerings provided through the Division of Undergraduate Education.
Initiatives

- Developing a more coherent and deliberate overall retention blueprint for the college. This project should help the newly reorganized Student Services personnel to work more cohesively and effectively.
- Revamping the college scholarship process to enhance recruiting and encourage retention. COHS believes recruiting and retention will be substantially aided by a process that promises scholarships on the front-end and for consecutive years (provided students continue to perform). The new process might partially match/leverage scholarship money for presidential scholars and proven achiever transfer scholars to potentially increase the acceptance rate of high quality students. COHS is currently analyzing prior years’ data to inform decisions about a revised process, and to ensure fiscal responsibility without over-commitment.
- Collecting digital comment cards for students to share concerns or feedback, with the option for the comments to remain confidential
- Running a COHS survey to properly assess student needs
- Offering HUSC 1100 – freshman transition course with a higher first semester/first year retention rate than COHS students that do not take the course. Potentially, this may include altering the course to provide smaller sections with career cluster-specific cohorts in Fall 2014
- Offering PADR 0041 for Human Sciences students on scholastic probation – taught by Director of Student Engagement and Retention
- Actively participating in university calling campaigns for unregistered students
- Reestablishing the Dean’s Leadership Council for Presidents of COHS student organizations and Senators to provide a greater connection between students and administration

Support Needed

- Open access to relevant student data specific to the College and Programs to assist in goal-setting and benchmarking
- Availability of predictive analytics to assist in their centralized, and eventually the development of department specific, retention activities
- Funds for travel to Enrollment Management Best Practices Conferences/Seminars
- Funds to support student services staff initiatives
- Additional staff for retention and recruitment

Current Structure/Approach

- The college provides a retention framework in the form of an Info Graphic.
- The document contained a number of current and future initiatives related to retention, that include the following:
  - hiring advisors for probationary students
  - students that have between a 2.0 – 2.5 GPA will be required to enroll in a studies skills course
students facing adversity, will now be required to attend a face-to-face meeting with their advisors.

- the web presence of additional retention services are being improved
- the college has developed a new freshman seminar course that is specific to its discipline
- the college has developed a new learning community in the residence halls
- the college is requiring that students complete the StrengthsQuest instrument

**Initiatives**

- Focus on “inside retention,” which has resulted in a first year freshman retention increase of 62% to 72%.
- The college will also implement its own “student ambassadors” program
- Other retention initiatives include:
  - augmenting the branding and publicity for the major and career options for those who are retained
  - create career counseling a portfolio development course
  - create more portfolio based outcome courses
  - expand undergraduate
  - research and mentoring opportunities
  - offer additional loyalty building events and programs
  - bridge courses between intro to the college and senior courses that builds college loyalty among students

**Support Needed**

- Hiring of an additional academic advisor for fall 2014 and one additional recruiter
- Helping to expand undergraduate research and mentoring opportunities, including internships and service learning
- Re-examine existing policies that appear a preventative to retention, i.e. hosting college events given current food and entertainment policies

*College of Visual & Performing Arts*

**Current Structure/Approach**

The college initiated a fall 2013 meeting of its entire administrative leadership to focus on the issue of retention. Topics of that meeting included:

- examination of academic suspension procedures
- consideration of the impact of summer enrollment and “getting back to campus” as an important aspect of retention in the specific college
- considering the different retention services for undergraduate versus graduate students
- consider the development of “enticement scholarships” that would incentivize students to return to complete their education
- possible development of recovery scholarships
**Initiatives**

An important issue is the cost of TTU summer courses versus community colleges. TTU-VPA is not a competitive value for students, versus community colleges. Students pursue their education at a community college based on cost. Often these students do not return to TTU. Accordingly,

- the college is examining long-range plans for summer enrollment,
- the college intends to better market its courses and the value of persisting at TTU, and
- the college is considering how to develop specialized courses that would be of unique interest in the summer, and which community colleges could not offer, i.e. accelerated for we courses that are highly creative and nimble

**Support Needed**

- additional professional development for academic advisors
- assistance with international students
- additional training for faculty and instructors to early identify those students at risk of departing the University prematurely