How the academy can support institutional efforts to improve retention and completion

Faculty play a critical role in shaping the student experience but are surprisingly underleveraged as allies in student success strategy. Here are six key ways that academic units and individual faculty members can help students successfully navigate their academic careers.

1. Addressing Curricular Barriers to Completion
   Recommendations
   - Arm Units with Data
     On-demand enrollment analytics help faculty to assess the consequences of proposed curricular changes.
   - Create Role-Based Working Groups
     Subcommittees with specific tasks make better use of faculty time (and expertise) than large task forces.
   - Skip the "Pilot" Phase
     Curricular reforms are most effective when treated as full-scale, managed projects, rather than one-off experiments.

2. Redesigning Academic Policies
   Recommendations
   - Balance Forgiveness with Proactive Advising
     Course repeat and probation policies should encourage students to explore alternative pathways to graduation.
   - Use Degree Plans as Guardrails
     Critical course and grade "milestones" can help faculty and staff evaluate students’ academic risk.
   - Incentivize Timely Progression
     Students are more likely to graduate on time if attempting (and completing) 30 credits per year is treated as default.

3. Evolving Academic Advising Models
   Recommendations
   - Outline and Differentiate Roles
     Faculty time is best spent on mentoring and academic consultation, not transactional or administrative activities.
   - Leverage Faculty in Advisor Trainings
     Involving faculty in regular staff trainings builds mutual trust and collaboration.
   - Consider Units’ Unique Staffing Needs
     Moving to a centralized advising model requires an investment in distributed administrative support.

4. Enhancing the Learning Experience
   Recommendations
   - Harness Grassroots Activity
     It should be easy for innovative instructors to apply for course redesign grants and generate scalable pedagogical models.
   - Reduce the Risk of Adoption
     Targeted support and recognition alleviates the pedagogical, technological, and social concerns of instructors.
   - Focus on Critical Courses
     Courses with high failure rates should be prioritized to maximize the impact of funded reforms on student success.

5. Flagging Signs of Student Risk
   Recommendations
   - Make It Simple
     Early-warning systems should be easy for faculty to use, with a single referral point for academic and behavioral concerns.
   - Make It Flexible
     Faculty should be able to determine the time period and performance threshold for early academic assessments, within reasonable boundaries.
   - Communicate the Impact
     Messages about the importance of early alerts in helping to connect students with critical support services should come from senior academic leaders.

6. Mentoring Rising-Risk Student Groups
   Recommendations
   - Target Less-Engaged Students
     Faculty mentoring efforts should be focused on students who aren’t already participating in honors programs or living and learning communities.
   - Monitor Transcript Requests
     Students may reconsider transfer to another institution after connecting with faculty in their field of interest.
   - Conduct Exit Surveys
     Information gathered from stop-outs and transfers can help to guide your intervention and engagement strategies.

Six Roles for Faculty in Student Success

Ready to learn more about faculty support for student success? Download the full study.

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