Defining the Faculty Role in Student Success

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

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

Recommended for Increasing Retention and Graduation Rates

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

...**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, widespread 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>6-Year Grad Rate</th>
<th>Peer Group Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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](chart)

**Average Five-Year Graduation Rates**
Public and Private US Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reduce and standardize number of credits required by majors for graduation</th>
<th>Create new professional advising roles to help high-risk students navigate early years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program heads perceive as threat to reputation and rigor</td>
<td>Units fear loss of control over curricular advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-year graduation rate stagnant, students struggle with aid limits and major changes</td>
<td>First-year and undeclared students drop out at high rates, pursue poor-fit programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement early warning system to track attendance and early performance</td>
<td>Hire instructional design staff to help faculty improve assessment design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty either unaware or view as busywork</td>
<td>Non-innovator faculty feel redesign not worth effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable issues go unaddressed, and many students aren’t contacted until withdrawing</td>
<td>High-failure courses hamstring first-year students, forcing repeats and remediation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

"[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

Engaging the Academy to Drive Change

Increasing Importance of Faculty Engagement Reflected by Evolution of Member Questions

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.
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
Faculty as Collective Decision Makers

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

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

PART 1
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

- 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/ira/), 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.

1. 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

2. 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

3. 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.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
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

Project Management Framework Guides Reform

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.

### 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

#### 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

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1) Estimate based on 2012 data.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
# Academic Policy Diagnostic

## Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

### How to Use This Diagnostic Tool

This resource, organized by category, will help you determine where your institution’s academic rules, regulations, and processes might create unnecessary obstacles for students. A small committee should review this list and evaluate the institution’s approach to each policy according to its relative leniency. **Detailed descriptions of each policy and relevant resources are included in the appendix at the listed page number.**

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.

### Degree Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Too Lenient</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Too Strict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree Plan Requirements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree Milestones</strong></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer Credit Articulation</strong></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Accelerating Degree Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Too Lenient</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Too Strict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Load</strong></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require all students to take 15 credits per term to be considered full-time</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Declaration</strong></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excess Credit Accumulation</strong></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☑️</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic Policy Diagnostic (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration and Course Scheduling</th>
<th>Bursar Holds</th>
<th>Multi-term Registration</th>
<th>Non-registered Students</th>
<th>Course Wait Lists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention of Unnecessary Withdrawals</th>
<th>Early Academic Alerts</th>
<th>Course Repeats</th>
<th>Course and Institutional Withdrawal</th>
<th>Academic Probation and Dismissal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Repeats</th>
<th>Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions</th>
<th>Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat</th>
<th>Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements</th>
<th>✗</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th>✗</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course and Institutional Withdrawal</th>
<th>Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction</th>
<th>Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal</th>
<th>Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal</th>
<th>✗</th>
<th>✗</th>
<th>✗</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Academic Probation and Dismissal | 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 | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
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.

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.
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.

Face-to-Face Meetings

- Trainings provided opportunity for faculty to meet advisors in person, not just over email
- Advisors gained faculty trust and connectedness

Beyond the Catalog

- Faculty leveraged as experts in major-specific curriculum
- Divisional faculty train advisors on degree maps and pathways
- Faculty share “not in the catalog” curricular highlights and pointers

Scenario Troubleshooting

- Advisors shared examples of student scenarios and questions where curricular advice would be beneficial
- Faculty impressed by depth of questions and sensitivity to student needs and outcomes
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

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

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.
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

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Support Evolving Advising Models

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

Duplicative activities
Unit staff trained on central service referrals
- Financial aid
- Mental health counseling
- Career services
- Event planning

Potential automation
Unit staff trained on new tools and technology
- Degree map software
- Online student records
- Budgeting and scheduling software

Academic advising
70% of staff funding reallocated to central advising unit
- Degree planning
- Registration
- Proactive outreach

Administrative support
30% of staff funding returned to units to help operations
- Administrative logistics
- Departmental programming

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Faculty as Individual Contributors

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

• 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**
- Accelerated Degree Pathways
- UC DAVIS iAMSTEM Active Learning Redesign
- ASU Adaptive Learning in First-Year Math
- OSU Alternative Classroom Designs

**Private 4-Year**
- Competency-Based Education
- Course Modularization
- Prior Learning Assessment
- Online First-Year Gen Ed Courses

**Canadian 4-Year**
- Entrepreneurship Incubators
- Competency-Focused Syllabi
- Teaching-Stream Faculty Rank
- Active Learning Lecture Software

**Public 2-Year**
- Open Course Library
- Predictive Academic Analytics
- Employer Curriculum Collaborations
- 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

Harnessing Grassroots Activity
Reducing the Risk of Adoption
Channeling Efforts to Priorities
Sustaining What Works

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

74%
Public Universities

78%
Private Universities

68%
Community Colleges

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

Garner Initial Support

- Faculty and staff trained on early warning system
- Reporting and response processes are clear

Achieve Full Adoption

- Faculty convinced of system’s impact
- Processes customized to promote further use

“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

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

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

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.

Sources:

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

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)
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.

“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

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Flyer Programming</th>
<th>The Engagement Gap</th>
<th>High-Risk Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living and learning communities</td>
<td>Disengaged students persist to upper division but lack faculty connection needed to complete</td>
<td>• TRIO student support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate research</td>
<td>31% Of students with a first-year GPA between 2.0 and 3.0 drop out between their second and sixth year¹</td>
<td>• Intensive coaching programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Tutoring and supplemental instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship and field experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic skills workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent study</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Math workgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors college</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹EAB analysis of 740,000 students at 73 public and private universities in the US (2014 “Murky Middle Project,” Student Success Collaborative).
Practice 12: Targeted First-Year Mentor Matching

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)

1. Outreach targets first-year students not involved in a Residential Academic Program (~50%)
2. 100 volunteer faculty mentors lead weekly “fireside chats” around known obstacles and student questions
3. Faculty given resource guides and training on what questions to refer to specialists
4. Information gathered from conversations used to inform first-year programming

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Student Sign Up-Form

Template – 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.
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
# Sample Faculty Mentoring Syllabus

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 9</strong></td>
<td><strong>Choosing a Major</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 10</strong></td>
<td><strong>Course Selection</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 11</strong></td>
<td><strong>Career Planning</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paper Writing</strong></td>
<td>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).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 13</strong></td>
<td><strong>Introduction to Co-Curricular Activities</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 14</strong></td>
<td><strong>Studying for Finals</strong></td>
<td>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).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 15</strong></td>
<td><strong>End of Semester Outing</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

Proactive Identification of Engagement Risk
Orientation survey, involvement analysis, or advisor referral prompts mentoring outreach

Students Matched with Faculty Mentors
Meeting with faculty in desired program to discuss opportunities for co-curricular involvement

Exit Survey
Diagnose motivation to inform attrition analysis

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

- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President’s Scorecard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Success</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees Confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Year Grad Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = 2,400; 75%; 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = 2,350; 74%; 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = 2,300; 73%; 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = 2,250; 72.5%; 41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = 2,150; 72%; 41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provost’s Scorecard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Success</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3rd year Progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 SCH, 60 SCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 = 77%; 61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = 76%; 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = 75%; 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = 74%; 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = 73%; 57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vice President of Enrollment Management’s Scorecard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Success</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3rd year Progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation metrics and grading scale to be determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Success</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headcount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation metrics and grading scale to be determined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Director’s Scorecard (Ex: Director of Advising)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Success</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3rd year Progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Freshman Degree Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Meetings for Sophomores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation metrics and grading scale to be determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Success</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor and Advisee Satisfaction Rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation metrics and grading scale to be determined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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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

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

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

Mission-Adjusted Performance Bonuses Push Academic Units to Improve Outcomes

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).

### Strategic Accountability Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Student Success Metric</th>
<th>Example: Student Credit Hours lost to DFW</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>▲ 1.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>▼ 0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1,879</td>
<td>1,303</td>
<td>▲ 1.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

### How to Use This Diagnostic Tool

This resource, organized by category, will help you determine where your institution’s academic rules, regulations, and processes might create unnecessary obstacles for students. A small committee should review this list and evaluate the institution’s approach to each policy according to its relative leniency. **Detailed descriptions of each policy and relevant resources are included at the listed page number.**

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.

### Degree Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Too Lenient</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Too Strict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree Plan Requirements</strong></td>
<td>Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning</td>
<td>Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor</td>
<td>Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree Milestones</strong></td>
<td>Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses</td>
<td>Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting</td>
<td>Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer Credit Articulation</strong></td>
<td>Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit</td>
<td>Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation</td>
<td>Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Accelerating Degree Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Too Lenient</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Too Strict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Load</strong></td>
<td>Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term</td>
<td>Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits</td>
<td>Require all students to take 15 credits per term to be considered full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Declaration</strong></td>
<td>Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution</td>
<td>Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree</td>
<td>Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excess Credit Accumulation</strong></td>
<td>Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance</td>
<td>Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status</td>
<td>Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Academic Policy Diagnostic (cont.)

## Registration and Course Scheduling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bursar Holds</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-term Registration</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to register for only one academic term at a time, excluding intersession</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-registered Students</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call students who fail to register before the deadline for unexplained reasons</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatically register students for courses using a prescriptive degree plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Wait Lists</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a new section any time a course hits 100% fill rate to accommodate demand</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Override registration caps for some students until wait list reaches enrollment minimum</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not allow students to register for courses after courses reach capacity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Preventing Unnecessary Withdrawals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Academic Alerts</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Repeats</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course and Institutional Withdrawal</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Probation and Dismissal</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to remain on probation indefinitely, regardless of improvement</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require students on probation to reverse GPA trend to continue at the institution</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismiss students if they fail to improve academic standing after one probationary term</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 timing and order of graduation requirements. Course catalogs typically include a list of the credits needed to complete a degree in each major area of study, but do not contain detail about how to build a course schedule based on requirements. Students may also struggle with balancing a full course load with work or other requirements, and without a dynamic 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-advice as much as possible in order to build a realistic and comprehensive four-year plan.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

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

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
- Revised term-by-term in meetings with advisor to account for any changes

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.

Too Lenient
Best Practice
Too Strict

Considerations for Implementation

1. Integrate “what-if” mapping into degree planning
   - Students can test scenarios, explore how degree plan would change given course choices
   - Enable students to see how deviation from plan would affect time-to-degree
   - Encourage students to develop alternative scenarios in case first choice major is not best fit

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 potential limited-capacity majors that will have to reject some student applicants
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 to graduate and credits needed
- **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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Schedule</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1: Fall Semester</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition 101</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complete English Composition with a C or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus 141</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Chemistry 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complete Introduction to Chemistry with a B or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Meet with advisor to register for classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science 101</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Year 1: Spring Semester</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Complete at least one semester of a foreign language by the end of the first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus 142</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complete Calculus 141 and 142 by the end of the first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Chemistry 2 with lab</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Biology 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Complete Intro to Biology 1 with a C or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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

**Alternative Exploratory 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 in some 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 so-called “milestone” courses and grades that best predict attrition risk and create a system of incentives that encourages success-focused behavior, prevents excessive deviation from planned degree pathways, and proactively provides support to students who diverge from their path.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

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

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

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

Too Lenient | Best Practice | Too Strict

Considerations for Implementation

1. Escalate complex student cases to specialized offices
   - If students miss a grade GPA milestone, tutoring resources can be of assistance
   - 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
   - Pre-term audit of registration reveals missing courses
   - Post-term audit of GPA 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 outcome
   - Student-facing notifications should focus on future choices, not simply at-risk status
**Degree Milestones (cont.)**

**Degree Plan Template and Milestone Best Practices**

**Example Degree Plan: Natural Sciences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Schedule</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1: Fall Semester</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition 101</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complete English Comp with a C or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus 141</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to Chemistry</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Complete Intro to Chemistry with a B or greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 1: Spring Semester</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
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<td>Complete at least one semester of a foreign language by the end of the first year</td>
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<td><strong>Total hours</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Degree Plan Best Practices**

**A+**

- ‘C’ grades 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

**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 meeting
- Recommended actions like completing a career inventory can also be included

**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
- Ensure early completion in degree plan

Source: 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 credits will transfer from other institutions and whether those credits substitute for 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

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

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, remediation need

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 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 remedial courses for common requirements
   • Transfer students whose credit is accepted may still sometimes be unable to show all competencies needed for a major requirement
   • Online, self-paced remedial courses can help these students improve their grades

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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

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
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.
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, allowing students to take an additional course or two at no additional cost. Too often, faculty and advisors recommend a lighter course to at-risk students, hoping that spending more time per course will help them progress. 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

- Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term
  - 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

Best Practice

- Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits
  - 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

Too Strict

- Require students to take 15 credit-hours per term to be considered full-time
  - 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 that 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 just due to taking 15 credits per term
   - Website language stresses that students can take “3 credits for free”; tuition is the same for all full-time students taking 12-15 credits

   *University of West Virginia system*

   - Resource folder on “15 to Finish” web portal includes talking points, logo materials, sample press release, sample tweets, and Facebook posts

3. **Define Success 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, completion of at least 25% of total graduation plan credit hours each year
   - Students also asked to model “success behaviors” such as working at a job no more than 20 hours per week, 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 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 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 to determine best fit ensures that students will not be delayed by late-stage major choices that require significant changes to 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 requirement

Considerations for Implementation

1. Require advisor meeting for third-year major changes

- Students can change their major with minimal penalty between 60 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 alternative programs related to limited-capacity majors 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 find the best fit for them.

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 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 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

*Georgia State 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 completing graduation requirements, unaware of the potential impact on their financial aid or tuition 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

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

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 despite incentives to do so

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
   - Only changes to alternative-track majors that will allow the student to apply their accumulated credit and graduate on time should be permitted in most cases
Excess Credit Accumulation (cont.)

Targeting Graduation Outreach to Student Populations

Transcript Audits

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

Fixing Unfulfilled Requirements

- **Prior credit:** work with students to determine if they can apply credit from other institutions, AP tests, or prior learning/life experience through writing an essay.
- **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.

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.

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 or provide financial resources that could assist them. 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 share financial resources and support students in their need, creating a stronger bond with the institution and 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 options for student-facing incentives to pay fees on time
  - Costly for universities if amount of outstanding student fees increases

- **Best Practice**
  - Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register
    - $100-500 threshold recommended for allowing registration (but triggering 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 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 One Year of Courses at a Time

Understanding the Problem

Traditionally, students register for courses in one term 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 demand and ensure that section offerings reflect student demand. Progressive institutions are beginning to allow students to register for courses a 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too Lenient</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
<th>Too Strict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow students to register for courses one term at a time, excluding intercession</td>
<td>Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once</td>
<td>Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does not encourage students to plan for the long term</td>
<td>• Students can plan ahead for conflicts such as off-campus work or studies abroad</td>
<td>• Significant strain on faculty, facilities planners, and registration systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More difficult for faculty and administrators to predict needed classroom capacity in advance</td>
<td>• Reopen registration at beginning of each term so that students can make changes</td>
<td>• Predictive data several years out is likely not robust and will not impact section planning choices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
   • First-year students registering in the fall compete with students who registered up to one year previously
   • Institutions must ensure reserved seats in common first-year courses before implementing

3. Use data to predict section and facilities needs
   • Early registration information can help predict potential high-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 adjuncts

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 waitlist

Prerequisite Checking

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

Source: 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 (student missed registration deadline) or more complex (a work conflict or personal concern interfered with student’s ability to register for courses). 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

Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term
- Allows students to effectively withdraw without completing the official process
- Limited support for students who need registration help

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

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 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 Student workers
   $8.15 Hourly pay rate
   8 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.”
   - “I decided I want to be a social worker and now I’m not sure if a Psychology major is right for me.”
   - “I can’t afford tuition anymore. I need to focus on working this semester so I can pay for college.”
   - “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.”
   - “Just thinking about signing up for another term makes me feel anxious. College is overwhelming.”

   Success Coach
   Academic and Career Advising
   Financial Aid
   Academic Department/Faculty Mentor
   Student Wellness/Mental Health Counseling

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
    - Increases time to graduation for students competing for seats in bottleneck courses

Considerations for Implementation

1. **Provide early online registration for new students**
   - Freshmen and transfers compete for seats in high-enrollment courses with returners who registered a term 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, instructor 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. **Focus on bottleneck courses that block progression**
   - If upper-division courses have fewer seats than requested from the lower-division course, or the course is not a requirement for any program, the course is not a true bottleneck
   - New sections do not need to be created for these courses
Course Wait Lists (cont.)

Priority Registration and Section Expansion Process Map

1. Give Priority Registration
   Before spring registration period

2. Override Seat Cap
   After spring registration period

3. Provide Pre-term Registration Option
   Before fall registration period

4. Open Additional Course Section
   After fall registration period

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.

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 rate gains.

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.

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

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.

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 the institution, 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
Best Practices for Designing Early Alert Systems for Faculty Engagement

Make it Simple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Referral</th>
<th>Target High-Risk Courses and Students</th>
<th>All-Inclusive</th>
<th>Includes Assistants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty given option to suggest specific response, but able to send all alerts to single office</td>
<td>Focus compliance efforts at highest-impact populations</td>
<td>Single system for logging academic, attendance, and behavioral alerts</td>
<td>Train graduate and teaching assistants to ensure coverage of introductory course sections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Address Faculty Concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Privacy</th>
<th>Positive Messaging</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
<th>Flexible Faculty Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty, advisors, RAs, and support staff able to submit alerts, but full access limited</td>
<td>Students encouraged to take clear action steps, rather than simply alerted of risk</td>
<td>Faculty informed of alert receipt, as well as progress and resolution of cases</td>
<td>Faculty able to decide whether and how to get involved with student issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructor-Specific Time Window and Grade Scale Improve Adoption

Faculty asked to determine best early assessment point

- Week 3
- Week 6

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 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 omit repeated courses, either through selection of a new major or of an equivalent 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 student 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 transcript to accurately reflect student’s experience

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

- Student fails to achieve a C or grade required for prerequisite
  - Course is not required for graduation, student chooses “late drop” option instead of repeating course
  - Student records “W” on transcript as final course grade

- Student takes course a second time
  - Student passes course or receives other required grade
  - Passing grade factored into GPA, previous attempts appear on transcript

- Student fails to achieve a C or grade required for prerequisite
  - Student obtains advisor waiver, pays repeat fee, takes course again

- Student required to meet with advisor
  - Student works with advisor to determine an alternative major and/or degree plan

- Failing grade factored into GPA

See pp. 84-85 for academic probation and dismissal policy

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

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
   • Module provides definition of withdrawal and distinction from course drop, leave of absence
   • 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
   • Provides positive and encouraging message

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.

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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

 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

 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

 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

Too Lenient  Best Practice  Too Strict

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

**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

**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

**After three semesters**

**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.
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