This case study is part of an eight-part series under APLU’s Guided Pathways for 4-Year Institutions model.

To view the model and other case studies, visit www.aplu.org/guidedpathways
4-Year Guided Pathways Case Study: Barnes & Noble LoudCloud

Introduction

Through a project management and design thinking approach, Portland State University developed centralized sources and processes to better serve students and to engage the entire campus community in student success (i.e., via Coordinated Services Network, steering committees, and charters in adaptive learning efforts, etc.). A specific project relates to progress on developing interactive degree maps, of which Portland formally partnered with Barnes & Noble LoudCloud to develop a web-based tool enabling students to chart their progress towards a degree and to understand their financial choices as well as impacts of changing majors.

The formal partnership between Portland State University and Barnes & Noble LoudCloud was the result of several months of planning and research in which PSU conducted extensive interviews with students and engagement with other key institutional offices to develop a more personalized and responsive process in advising. The tool complements the institution’s advising redesign efforts—a cornerstone of the reTHINK PSU initiative. With this tool, PSU saw improvements in credit accumulation along with enrollments and completions. Students have a stronger understanding of what credits count towards a degree, and the tool further strengthens credit-bearing pathways from local community colleges.

Description of Strategy

Students looking to enroll in a four-year university through the community college path experience complications, thus increasing the number of dropouts and stop-outs. This complication does not only impact the students but the front-line practitioners as they are overwhelmed with the increase in academic policy transfer changes that at times may not be easily communicated, in addition to the large student caseloads. Nationwide, only 19 percent of four-year public university students and 5 percent of community college students graduate on time and on budget, according to data from Complete College America. And according to recent research from the Community College Research Center (CCRC), only about 60 percent of community college students can successfully transfer most credits when transferring to a four-year school, and 15 percent are able to transfer a few credits.
Portland State University centered student insights and analytics in their approach to improving student outcomes and graduation rates. PSU built a degree planning solution in partnership with BNED LoudCloud. The tool helps students understand their academic and financial options and chart a path to graduation. It also will help schools better serve students and leverage valuable, limited resources to improve retention and graduation rates.

Relation to the Model

Through on-ramps recruitment, entry, and progress, PSU’s degree-planning tool allows students and advisors to compare different paths by program, credit pace, time to graduation and cost. Each plan is tailored to the individual student and his or her lifestyle. The tool is designed from the user point of view and integrated into the suite of PSU tools, and easy to access and navigate.

Although the tool does not automate for one of the elements of the model, completion, which instead, it will provide better direction and enable college advisors to be more effective in supporting students. It will minimize the workload, which means the conversations students and advisors have with each other will focus less on the mechanical side of creating a plan and more on the human side — understanding where they want to go and the individual path that will work best for them. One can deduce that less focus on the mechanical side can lead front-line practitioners to ultimately create a seamless path to completion and finally, transition.