Making Student Success a Priority

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

At Ohio University (OU), the complexity of enrollment patterns make achieving a shared understanding of student success an ongoing effort. For example, OU reports a 68 percent graduation rate to the federal government's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Yet the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) calculates that 80 percent of first-year students at Ohio University typically earn a degree within six years, while another 9 percent remain enrolled beyond that point, actively working toward a degree. Such discrepancies can be baffling to constituent groups both inside and outside the university.

To address clarity challenges, the provost's office at OU regularly emphasizes to the board of trustees the importance of data quality, reliability, and definitions in considering student success. As a result, the highest levels of OU leadership have become united in their investment in student support as well as in the analytics necessary to do that work.

USING DATA TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

PROVOST DASHBOARD. The provost's academic affairs dashboard highlights yearly student success changes, including first-year retention rates, graduation rates, and loan default rate, as well as data from the National Survey of Student Engagement regarding student experiences with faculty research. The example (Figure 1) displays year-over-year changes. Each academic dean has developed a similar

Figure 1: Monitoring Changes in the Dashboard Indicators

Monitoring Changes in the Dashboard Indicators

	Most Current OHIO	OHIO 5 year average	Most Current Ohio Public
First-Year Retention	80.2%	80.0%	71.0%
Six Year Graduation Rate	67%	66%	48%
Four Year Graduation Rate	45%	47%	26%
Degrees Granted	7,120	6,032	3,976
ACT Composite	23.9	23.9	23.1
Student-Faculty Ratio	18:1	19:1	18:1
Group 1 Faculty	73%	77.6%	73%
Research and Creative Activity Expo Participation	804 students	695 students	Not applicable
Grants and Contracts FY 12	$54.5 M	$61.3 M	Not available

dashboard for their college and presents annually to the trustees, focusing on student success and learning opportunities within their college.

STUDENT SUCCESS CRM SYSTEM. The 2011 implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) system for student success has supported OU's ability to provide early and targeted intervention to individual students. Previously, the first accessible feedback on student performance was not available until grades were entered at the end of the first term. The CRM system supports the collection and analysis of firsthand, student-level survey and academic information much earlier in the term. These responses come directly from students regarding their academic, social, financial, or other needs and allow

for targeted outreach to guide them to the best path for success. Initially intended just for high-risk first-year students, OU has expanded the system's use to all students, including regional, online, and upper-level undergraduates.

These data conversations also prompted the OU Office of Institutional Research to appoint a Director of Student Success Analytics. This position oversees the management of the CRM in addition to developing tracking reports and conducting research and analysis to support retention efforts. By analyzing the data collected in the CRM, OU could identify areas where students struggle and focus resources on those areas. For example, they could deploy tutors or other academic support to courses where students are struggling. Within the first year, the university secured external funding from a national grant to support the persistence and degree completion of upper-class students. To further support these efforts, OU hired professional advisors to supplement the pre-existing faculty-led advising program, so that each college would have centrally coordinated and well-informed support for students to ensure their on-time graduation.

RESULTS

The programs described above have improved the OU student experience through additional and existing resources. This was demonstrated by a 2.4 percent increase in retention from the 2014 (79.1 percent) to the 2015 (81.5 percent) cohorts. Some of these investments are in early stages, so it is hoped that this trend will continue. In addition to retention, these programs have demonstrated a benefit to students and faculty. Through use of the CRM, students receive timely and specific information to assist them with their transition to and through all aspects of the university. Furthermore, the addition of professional academic advisors in the colleges provides students with the benefits of both faculty and professional advising. The

professional advisors can stay current on all programs and services available to students across campus, allowing faculty advisors to focus on academic as well as discipline- and career-related priorities. Finally, the university's participation in a national research grant will provide students with a free service of text message reminders regarding important deadlines and coaching to improve degree completion. This effort is based on existing research demonstrating that these brief contacts, referred to as 'nudges,' are effective in supporting small behavioral changes that can impact the odds of completing a degree.

LESSONS LEARNED

As a result of its campus-wide student success efforts, Ohio University learned the following lessons and insights.

▶ **Cultivate shared understanding among campus stakeholders to initiate action.** OU leadership's efforts to communicate the complexity of improving and documenting student success have demonstrated the value of sharing data with trustees and other audiences to focus and act on the issue of student success.

▶ **Gather timely, accurate, student-level.** There is no shortage of research demonstrating the importance of various critical transition points where students may need intervention or support. The challenge is having the student-level data, real-time analytics, and agility to provide personalized resources to students at these critical points.

▶ **Emphasize the need for additional information.** One outcome measure that has not been consistently available and is of great interest to OU and its trustees is the success of students in their employment following graduation. The university is working through various methods to improve the quality of data in this area.