



The University of Vermont

STUDENT RETENTION ACTION PLAN

Prepared by:

Stacey Kostell
Vice President for Enrollment Management

Sarah Warrington
Coordinator of Strategic Retention

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Increasing the retention of our undergraduate students is a priority for the University of Vermont, as articulated in the President's Strategic Action Plan and the underpinning Academic Excellence Goals. The importance of our focus here cannot be overstated – delays in student progress negatively impact a student's likelihood of graduation, the cost and affordability of a college degree, the quality of a student's overall educational experience, and a university's reputation and rankings. Forfeited revenue is, of course, another impact. Under the University's budget model, undergraduate net tuition revenue flows directly to the colleges and schools.

The University's retention rate hovers at 86% and has remained essentially unchanged over the last ten years. While this number is not low relative to national averages for public universities, it is low relative to nearly all of our comparator institutions (public and private). As we work together to increase this rate, a coordinated, sustained, comprehensive, and strategic approach is necessary. This Student Retention Action Plan provides such an approach and is intended to serve as a guide document for deans and other leaders as we seek to realize measurable progress in the next three years.

The Student Retention Action Plan identifies retention action steps, responsible parties, timelines, and outcomes. It was developed in partnership with academic and student service leadership in the colleges and schools, Student Affairs, the Office of Institutional Research, the Division of Enrollment Management, and the Office of the Provost. Its contents have been informed by (1) trial and error of individual retention efforts within selected units, (2) January 2017 updates to college/school retention plans, (3) thoughtful feedback shared during retention discussions over the fall 2017 semester, and (4) deans' comments on the draft plan.

Increased student retention is a priority for the University. Working together, we have every confidence we can realize improvements in this important indicator for student success and satisfaction.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stacey Kostell'.

Stacey Kostell
Vice President for Enrollment Management

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Rosowsky'.

David Rosowsky
Provost and Senior Vice President

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of a university’s educational experience is measured in part by undergraduate student retention and graduation rates. As the University of Vermont continues to “foster quality and academic excellence by improving the whole student experience” (President’s Strategic Action Plan, 2013), collaboration across the institution will be necessary to advance our goals in these areas.

The University of Vermont has maintained retention and graduation rates well above the national averages for four-year, public institutions. However, even as our rates of retention and four-year graduation outperform national statistics, our current first-year retention rate of 86% and four-year graduation rate of 64% place us near the bottom of our comparator group. As we look to increase these rates, which have been virtually unchanged for the last 10 years, a substantial commitment on the part of the institution is necessary.

National retention research and practice reveal that increases in retention and graduation rates require a “web of interlocking initiatives” (Kuh, 2005) that connect and integrate with overarching institutional goals and values. Meaningful change is the product of a network of comprehensive, sustained efforts that enrich the educational experience and take in to account the diversity of students served by the University.

Frequently when we talk about why students persist at an institution, we look to the 10 known factors that impact student retention. The factors are broken in to two categories: student characteristics and institutional experiences.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES
Academic prep	Level and quality of engagement
Residency	Integration (academic, co-curricular and social)
Gender	Academic challenge
Motivation/Grit	Supportive campus environment
Financial	
External (family, behavioral)	

Fundamentally, a student bases their decision to stay or to leave on a complex set of factors comprised of unique costs and benefits. From an institutional point of view, if we are to be strategic, we must identify factors that are shared by many students and over which our institutional activity can have influence. Then, we must develop or improve upon systems to exert that influence.

Some of the factors outlined above are unchangeable and/or determined before a student arrives. As an institution, we may act through our recruitment and selection processes to determine the makeup of pre-college factors and how they affect entering students. We can also impact how pre-college factors affect a student’s success by providing interventions designed to augment or lessen those factors.

Undoubtedly, the overall on-campus experience is influenced by the choices and functioning of the student within the environment. It is important for us to gather information about the nature and quality of students’ experiences and to review and alter campus systems that we know to be critical to students’ satisfaction as well as those that are known to cause difficulties. Ultimately, all of the factors, which encompass a student’s academic, social and cultural integration in the university environment, serve as key determinants in their overall rate of retention.

CURRENT SITUATION

The University of Vermont has turned substantial attention to the first-year retention rate over the last five years and has set a first-year retention target of 90%. With the hiring of the Coordinator of Undergraduate Retention & Re-enrollment (now Coordinator of Strategic Retention) in April 2016, centralized processes for tracking details about students' reasons for departure have been implemented. Data from the Leave of Absence/Withdrawal form supports the notion that in-state students are retained at a higher rate than out of state students, and that many students are leaving due to individual circumstances or responses to some dissatisfaction with place. We know that there is potential to increase the retention of high achieving students who earn a grade-point average of 3.0 and above in their first semester, and given the addition of the Catamount Commitment program, we should see gains in our retention of Pell-eligible, Vermont students.

The reports submitted to the Provost and President by each of the Deans in January 2017 clearly delineated the need for a software and retention tool that can facilitate consistent use of alerts and interventions by advisors.

1. RETENTION DATA

On average, we consistently lose:

- 14% of any entering first year class by the start of their second year
- An additional 9-10% of second to third year students

Comparator School Retention Data

The following list is generated by the Board of Trustees as comparison and aspirant institutions for the University of Vermont

SCHOOL	US NEWS RANK (2018)	Avg. First-Year Retention Rate
Boston College	32	95%
College of William & Mary	32	96%
Boston University	37	93%
George Washington University	56	92%
University of Connecticut	56	93%
Syracuse University	61	92%
Univ of Massachusetts – Amherst	75	90%
Binghamton University – SUNY	87	91%
Stony Brook – SUNY	97	90%
University of Vermont	97	86%

2. FACTORS THAT IMPACT RETENTION

First-Year Retention by Residency

	VERMONT	OUT-OF-STATE
2013	91.5%	85.3%
2014	88.6%	85.0%
2015	90.6%	85.6%
2016	90.3%	85.1%

First-Year Retention by Gender

	FEMALE	MALE
2013	87.1%	86.4%
2014	86.8%	84.7%
2015	88.6%	83.7%
2016	86.8%	85.3%

Pell-Eligible Student Retention by Residency

	VERMONT	OUT-OF-STATE
2013	90.8%	81.7%
2014	84.9%	79.2%
2015	87.5%	80.9%
2016	90.3%	83.0%

Number of Students Who Left UVM by First Fall Semester Grade-Point-Average

	FALL 2013	FALL 2014	FALL 2015	FALL 2016
3.00-3.49	69	62	86	103
>3.50	59	59	57	67

Leave of Absence/Withdrawal Form Data

Just over 340 LOA/Withdrawal Forms have been collected between January and February 20, 2018, with 226 of those students noting that they either plan to or will likely return.

Students are able to self-select the reasons for their departure from a short list of possible answers (see below). The reasons for departure noted on the completed forms are as follows: *(Note: Some students have listed more than one reason in their response.)*

REASONS FOR DEPARTURE	FIRST-TIME, FIRST-YEARS	OTHER	TOTAL # OF RESPONSES
Personal (individual circumstance)	35	109	146
Financial	16	54	70
Medical: Mental Health	19	50	69
Academics	16	42	58
Campus Climate/Environment (individual response to place)	16	32	48
Medical: Other	6	14	20
No response	8	2	2

Personal:

- I got an offer from a school more fitting to my interests.
- The soccer situation here didn't work out so I am going to another school to play.
- I have been accepted into the American Academy of Rome's Sustainable Food Program. I will be working 50 hours/week in a kitchen learning about how to incorporate sustainability as well as learning how to cook. I'm joining this program because I think it will further my development within the food system, launch me forward in my career, and allow me to take a stimulating break from school.
- My decision to leave mainly revolves around personal reasons. The social environment was not a right fit for me and the university lost its appeal because I was in a major that was not my passion. Therefore, my reason for going to UVM (to pursue a career in nursing) didn't make sense to me anymore.
- Found a job offer in my dream field with no degree required.

Financial

- After much thought I have decided to leave UVM to go back to my home state of California where I can get an education for a drastically lower tuition price and be closer to family. I have realized that Vermont is just not the right state for me to be in, so I am choosing to go back home.
- I am leaving UVM because it is too expensive, and I can go to school in the city for free tuition. I'm also looking for a more production-based film program with more opportunities and Brooklyn College has that.
- I am transferring to my local community college to save money.
- Lost scholarship and unable to afford without.

Medical: Mental Health

- I have been experiencing mental health issues that have made it difficult to do well here at the University.
- My mother committed suicide in Fall 2015 and by Fall 2016 I thought I was well enough to take on a rigorous college curriculum, but I was wrong. I have utilized the excellent supports provided to me through ACCESS but they did not help as much as I had hoped. I think that in this leave of absence (Spring 2018) and during the summer (2018), through weekly therapy, yoga, and more head space to focus on myself, I will be able to learn ways of coping or dealing with my issues. My graduation from UVM is very important to me but my ability to fully absorb the valuable education provided here is more important. I am requesting this leave of absence to be used as a pause in my schooling, so that I can get well in order to return and get the education I know UVM can give me.
- I'm having problems inside my own head that are creating other, more significant problems like grades in school. Because of this, I believe I need to take a semester off and stay at home and go to community college for a semester to pull myself together.
- I was hoping to work through some emotional trauma while still attending UVM but have recently realized I can't. It is consuming my life and effecting my work. I need to take time off to heal.

Academics

- Going abroad with SEA Semester, an abroad program not affiliated with the University.
- In the beginning I really did not like UVM, so I decided to leave. After I gave it some time I met incredible people and really started to enjoy my time here. Unfortunately I got into Boston University, and while I started to have an incredible experience at UVM, I couldn't pass up this opportunity. I want to thank this school so much, UVM is truly an incredible school, and I am so lucky to have gone here even if only for a semester.
- I wish to pursue a career in the veterinary technology field at a community college near my hometown. I was unsure of what I was going to end up doing with my major in Biology here at UVM and I figured out what I wanted to do in the future. Thus, prompting me to look into schools that focus on the veterinary technology program.

Campus Climate/Environment

- I do not feel that UVM has a welcoming and inclusive social environment.
- I do not think UVM is a good fit for me. I have had the worst experience with residential life and nobody has been able to help.

3. DEAN'S RETENTION REPORTS

In January 2017, the Deans provided updates to their college/school retention plans. The following items were listed as obstacles to improving retention rates:

- Lack of a centralized, electronic advising system
- Lack of student data and predictive analytics
- Capacity/Resources to expand advising staff or expectation of faculty advisors
- Inconsistent use of available tools (academic alerts)
- Students coming to campus with complex personal challenges
- Cost/Solutions for students with financial needs

STRATEGIES FOR IMPACTING CHANGE

Based on national research, and our own findings on retention and progression, we have identified four major strategies that form the basis of our Action Plan:

1. Implement and maximize Education Advisory Board-Student Success Collaborative to best utilize predictive data and to synthesize communications efforts.
2. Coordinate intentional outreach and interventions for students based on known risk categories.
3. Expand upon and integrate First-Year Experience efforts to improve the level of engagement and integration of academic, co-curricular and social aspects of campus life.
4. Improve the quality of engagement and academic challenge for high-performing students.

COLLABORATING WITH STUDENT AFFAIRS

The strategies in the Action Plan primarily focus on activities coordinated by the Division of Enrollment Management or the Colleges/Schools. There are numerous strategies coordinated throughout the Division of Student Affairs and other units, including the Division of Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, that are not included in this plan. These units will continue to be partners in providing a successful student experience and a larger all-encompassing plan will be provided in the future.

ACTION PLAN

The following plan includes actions for continued effort or implementation during year one of execution of the Education Advisory Board-Student Success Collaborative software (SSC). We believe that we will best be able to use data and information gained from the SSC in our decision-making about additional tactics and priorities in reaching retention goals after this initial period of use. Looking forward, we will seek out places to create consistency and efficiency given the capabilities that exist within the software tool.

STRATEGY 1: IMPLEMENT AND MAXIMIZE EAB/SSC: DATA AND COMMUNICATIONS

ACTION ITEM:	Implement new advising and retention software – Education Advisory Board-Student Success Collaborative.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Director of Office of Institutional Research, Registrar
TIMELINE:	Summer 2018
OUTCOME:	Improved communication, tracking and analytics of student data. Resulting in strategies and tactics to implement to improve retention.

ACTION ITEM:	Evaluate and amend methods of messaging to students. Determine common contact points and streamline communications within the new EAB mobile application. Define interplay of MyUVM portal and EAB application.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Vice President for Enrollment Management, Director (University Communications), Marketing Director (Dean of Student's Office), Registrar's Office, Coordinator of Strategic Retention
TIMELINE:	Spring 2018 and beyond
OUTCOME:	Improved communication to students allowing for more information choices and a successful transition.

ACTION ITEM:	Following EAB implementation, explore use of course planning tools (i.e. the 4-Year Plan of Study) within DegreeWorks and possible integration with EAB system.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Vice President for Enrollment Management, Registrar
TIMELINE:	Fall 2019
OUTCOME:	If feasible, help students better plan for future semester course enrollment; aid departments in longer term capacity-building.

STRATEGY 2: AT-RISK OUTREACH AND INTERVENTION

ACTION ITEM:	<p>Initiate strategic, systematized communications and interventions with students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do not register in a timely way during the course registration period ● Submit requests for academic transcripts ● Attempt to drop their last class during the add/drop window of each fall/spring semester ● Do not register and who achieve a 3.0 grade-point-average or higher in their first or second year
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Assistant Coordinator of Retention, Registrar's Office, Assistant Deans (Student Services)
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Ability to collect information from students who are not satisfied with their UVM experience and/or assist students who need help in overcoming an obstacle to continue their education (financial, etc.)

ACTION ITEM:	Require that students who earn below a 2.0 GPA in their first fall semester meet with an advisor to create a success plan. Plan should involve regular check ins and can utilize model to be created by Coordinator of Strategic Retention or that which is desired by college/school.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Assistant Deans (Student Services), College/School Faculty, Coordinator of Strategic Retention
TIMELINE:	In place for use following Fall 2018
OUTCOME:	Early, consistent assistance provided to at risk students; improved retention of FTFY who do poorly in academics during fall semester.

ACTION ITEM:	Annually extract and review list of first year students who are not retained by college/school with Deans. Provide analysis of data gained on this population via the Leave of Absence/Withdrawal form, incorporating details known about students by Student Financial Services and Office of Institutional Research (i.e. ACE, learning community involvement). In collaboration with colleges/schools, generate school-specific strategies given data insights.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Deans, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Coordinator of Strategic Retention
TIMELINE:	Existing action item – meetings with Deans and VP for Enrollment Management to take place in Fall 2017.
OUTCOME:	Education and sharing to improve data collection and brainstorm ideas.

ACTION ITEM:	Employ the Student Success Collaborative to track academic alert warnings (i.e. grade point average, number and type of alerts) and collaborate with college/schools to train advisors on implementation of early intervention processes.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Assistant Deans (Student Services)
TIMELINE:	Will be rolled out with SSC Go Live in Fall 2018.
OUTCOME:	Improved business process for academic alerts and follow-up procedures to track and connect with students who may be struggling earlier in the semester.

ACTION ITEM:	Institute consistent, timely communication with students demonstrating high-risk academic performance markers including, poor performance in first year courses, dropping a class in first fall semester and maintenance of less than full time status.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Registrar's Office, Office of Institutional Research
TIMELINE:	Will be rolled out with SSC Go Live in Fall 2018
OUTCOME:	Allow advisors to target students who need assistance and provide resources for success.

ACTION ITEM:	Track success of special interest student cohorts and provide communication and enrichment activities. These cohorts include: Catamount Commitment students, students from the partnership schools, Abenaki and New Americans.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Associate Director of Diversity Recruitment, Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Student Financial Services
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Improved sense of belonging, personalized attention, and increased enrollment and retention of these student populations.
ACTION ITEM:	Analyze retention data from the second to third year. Determine which students may be at risk and recommend strategies.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Office of Institutional Research
TIMELINE:	Late Fall 2018-Spring 2019
OUTCOME:	Creation of strategies and activities to compliment the FYE program.
ACTION ITEM:	Evaluate and revise holistic admissions process to better predict fit and consider academic preparedness. Utilize information in retention forecasting.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Director of Admissions Office, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Data Analyst (VPEM), Office of Institutional Research
TIMELINE:	Fall 2018 and beyond
OUTCOME:	Improved overall student satisfaction and academic fit and experience.
ACTION ITEM:	Develop a strategy to better predict course demand, classroom space needs and how to leverage summer course offerings, including offerings for international students, to support on-time graduation.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Vice President for Enrollment Management, Registrar, Deans/Associate Deans
TIMELINE:	Spring 2019
OUTCOME:	Improved registration experience and overall academic experience relating to improved progression rates.

ACTION ITEM:	Conduct outreach to students who complete the medical withdrawal process and are looking to return to campus prior to the recommended one-semester time away. Ensure that students returning from a medical withdrawal receive required support, as needed, from colleges/schools and other campus resources (i.e. CAPS, Residential Life, Student Health, etc.)
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Assistant Dean of Students for Retention, Coordinator of Strategic Retention
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Reduction of students who take multiple “stop-outs” delaying graduation and/or completion.

STRATEGY 3: EXPANSION AND INTEGRATION OF FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE EFFORTS

ACTION ITEM:	Analyze and present data gained from the annual 6-week survey completed by first-time, first-years, sophomores and transfer students and provide strategies for improvement. Complete personalized outreach to students requesting follow up within survey. (Data is presented to Provost’s Academic Leadership Council, Associate Deans, Faculty Senate, Student Affairs Leadership and Student Services Collaborative.)
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Student Affairs Senior Assessment and Technology Specialist, Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Assistant Dean of Students for Retention, Assistant Coordinator of Retention
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Improve student experience, and provide information to faculty and staff to implement strategies when appropriate.

ACTION ITEM:	Authentically engage faculty in providing proactive, personalized support to students via mentoring programs, such as the Catamount Commitment Mentor Program, and/or within residential learning communities.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Deans/Associate Deans, Vice Provost of Student Affairs, Director of Residential Life, Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Assistant Coordinator of Retention
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Improved sense of belonging, personalized attention, and increased enrollment and retention of these student populations.

ACTION ITEM:	Adjust housing assignments to October for returning students
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Residential Life
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Improve sense of belonging by encouraging behaviors that indicate a student's desire to return to UVM early in their first year. Ability to track students who do not complete this item early on, to impact change.

ACTION ITEM:	Require first-year students to meet with academic advisors within <i>first six weeks</i> of a new semester for broad advising conversation. Encouraged topics for discussion to include: academics (i.e. course scheduling), career goals and plans, activities other than coursework (i.e. committees, student groups) and course topics, ideas or concepts.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Provost, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Deans
TIMELINE:	Make active in Fall 2018.
OUTCOME:	Early intervention to assist students who may be struggling academically or socially. Improved sense of belonging and personalized attention leading to increased student satisfaction.

ACTION ITEM:	Require first-year students to meet with academic advisors <i>prior to spring course registration</i>. Encouraged topics for discussion to include: academics (i.e. course scheduling), career goals and plans, activities other than coursework (i.e. committees, student groups) and course topics, ideas or concepts.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Provost, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Deans
TIMELINE:	Make active in Spring 2019.
OUTCOME:	Better understanding of academic requirements, and improved progression rates.

ACTION ITEM:	Re-examine messaging after admissions acceptance. Incite college/school participation during Orientation and Welcome Week programming by incorporating academically-focused events and messaging.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Director of Center for Academic Success, Deans, Assistant Deans (Student Services), Director of Marketing (Student Affairs)
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Cultivate an early affinity with the academic aspects of the institution and foster student engagement with high impact practices in their first year.

ACTION ITEM:	Fully implement the FYE strategic plan by Fall 2019, including 100 percent of new students living in learning communities.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	FYE Committee
TIMELINE:	Fall 2019
OUTCOME:	Improved student satisfaction and engagement with peers, faculty and staff. Improved sense of belonging.

STRATEGY 4: ENGAGING AND CHALLENGING

ACTION ITEM:	Provide a congratulatory letter to students who achieve a 3.0 grade-point-average or higher after first semester. Encourage involvement in high impact/leadership activities and host a recognition event for students who have a 3.5 or above at start of spring semester.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Coordinator of Strategic Retention, Vice President for Enrollment Management
TIMELINE:	Spring 2018
OUTCOME:	Improved sense of belonging to students and engagement in high impact and/or academically-focused activities.

ACTION ITEM:	Create or enhance engagement and leadership opportunities within the colleges/schools (i.e. experiential learning elements, first year advisory boards, academically focused student clubs, etc.)
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Deans/Associate Deans, Coordinator of Strategic Retention
TIMELINE:	Spring 2018 and beyond
OUTCOME:	Improved sense of belonging to students and engagement in high impact and/or academically-focused activities.

ACTION ITEM:	Work collaboratively with colleges/schools to create strategies for retention using ACE score and first fall performance data to better engage high ability students.
PERSONS/GROUPS RESPONSIBLE:	Vice President for Enrollment Management, Director of Institutional Research
TIMELINE:	Existing action item
OUTCOME:	Improved sense of belonging to students and engagement in high impact and/or academically- focused activities.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR RETENTION-RELATED INITIATIVES

Education Advisory Board

The Education Advisory Board (EAB) will be a valued partner to the University of Vermont as we implement and begin to utilize the Student Success Collaborative software. Based on their experience having helped hundreds of institutions with software implementation, we trust that they will provide clear expectations and guidelines, comprehensive project planning and project management support. EAB also offers onsite orientation, guided training and ongoing support sharing best practices and tips to optimize the value of the software and analytics.

Once implementation is complete, the University of Vermont will engage with EAB through the annual summit meant to foster networking and collaboration among cohort institutions. We'll also have access to a national dataset that can reveal high-level insight and allow for benchmarking. Finally, we can participate in web-conferences and utilize publications shared by the EAB to gain student success ideas, training, best practices and innovations.

Vice President of Enrollment Management Retention Positions

The Coordinator of Strategic Retention and the Assistant Coordinator of Undergraduate Retention and Re-enrollment will work collaboratively with the academic colleges and schools and a variety of campus stakeholders to implement the Student Success Collaborative software and provide best practices in student retention strategies.

Student Retention Action Plan Committee

The Coordinator of Undergraduate Retention will work with a committee with representatives from each of the college/schools to assist with the implementation of the Student Retention Action Plan. This group will determine critical data needs, review the status of college/school specific initiatives, and progress against the Student Retention Action Plan.

Colleges/Schools

The colleges/schools offer unique perspectives on the challenges and potential tactics that can be utilized to retain and graduate students. As we look to enact the Student Retention Action Plan, the colleges/schools will need to be on board and must consider the action items a priority. It will be critical that college/school efforts complement and reinforce the Plan.

Comparator Institutions

As we formalize our retention strategies and consider where the greatest impact lies, we will undertake a review of other institutions that we know have been successful. Visits to these institutions, such as Georgia State and Stony Brook, may be planned, and we will interact with similar institutions through professional conferences and the EAB summit.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICES IN RETENTION

In the Fall of 2017, the Vice President of Enrollment Management and Coordinator of Strategic Retention met with the Deans and Student Services staff from each of the seven colleges/schools. In addition to the items outlined in the Action Plan, the following are best practices in retention gleaned from the conversations:

1. Colleges/schools benefit from the use of a survey designed to prompt interventions with students who are not flagged solely based on their academic record.
2. Advisor(s) should communicate with students prior to the first day of classes in order to create early association to the college/school and university. Ideally, students will meet with or have some interaction with advisors during Orientation and again in late August.
3. Colleges/schools should be deliberate in informing students about who their advisor is, why they should visit with their advisor and what they should expect from the advising relationship.
4. First Year Seminar courses are most effective when they introduce students to college/school expectations, major offerings and career pathways and academic and co-curricular opportunities for engagement.
5. High achieving first-year students should be informed of and exposed to engagement opportunities in high impact practices, within the college/school and campus-wide, after the fall semester, if not before.
6. In addition to monitoring students of concern, faculty should track and share names of students of promise (i.e. who do well academically, who are active and involved in college/school) with Dean's offices. This practice can lead to timely recognition and nudging, causing students to feel noticed and connected.

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

FYE Steering Committee

Cross-divisional (Provost, Enrollment Management and Student Affairs) leadership committee meeting monthly to provide campus-wide coordination of programs and services, as well as long-term planning, strategy and support for new initiatives. The current focus is on communication strategies, curriculum and program development, and assessment/analysis related to retention and student success.

Learning Communities with Embedded Course

A multi-year plan is underway to transform the first-year residential experience. In their first year, students will reside in themed Learning Communities. These programs marry traditional academic experiences (each includes a 1-credit course) with learning outside of the classroom, fostering community and experiential learning.

Three of these new Learning Communities launched in Fall 2017: Sustainability, Leadership and Outdoor Experience. Each is led by a team of faculty and staff, and includes robust residential programming integrated with one-credit courses sponsored and taught by faculty from related academic areas. These three new LC's joined pre-existing residential academic programs: the Wellness Environment, the Honors College and a few smaller residential programs, such as Global Village and CAS' Dean's Signature Programs. In the 2017-18 academic year, 76% of our first-year students live in one of these communities and enrolled in the related course. Exemptions for enrollment in the course were available on an individual basis for students whose course load prohibited the addition of another credit.

Fall of 2018 will bring the launch of three additional Learning Communities, each with a one-credit course: Arts and Creativity, Cultural Crossroads, and Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Interdisciplinary teams of faculty contributors emerged in Fall 2017 for each of these new communities.

Universal Elements in First Year Seminars

Beginning in fall of 2018, each one-credit Learning Community course will contain two universal content elements: Growth Mindset and the 4 Career Success Year Plan. Some College/Schools that offer first year seminars also include these elements.