

Faculty Senate Faculty Affairs Team
Efforts to Aid Student Success and Retention
Draft: March 15, 2013

Context

Fall of 2012: the FAT was asked to consider and suggest ways that faculty might contribute to student retention efforts at FGCU. The Team met with the Provost and discussed options, then presented a set of recommendations at the 10/5/2012 Faculty Senate meeting. After a lengthy discussion, the Senate decided to send these recommendations back to the FAT for further review and revision.

Spring 2013: FAT again met with the Provost and addressed Senate faculty concerns.

Process

The Team appreciates the effort made by Academic Affairs and Faculty Senate to consider how faculty might contribute to this important effort in meaningful, productive ways. Towards that end, Team members sought data identifying the reasons why students drop out at FGCU and nationally, investigated related academic policies from FGCU peer institutions in Florida, and researched national studies on factors influencing student failure and student drop-outs. The Team, with local institutional experience within the colleges, also brainstormed to identify important factors and possible efforts that could be undertaken at the University.

While available student success/retention data at FGCU is currently limited or inconclusive, the Team found numerous, extensive studies conducted by other universities and by academic consultants on best practices and processes for improving student retention. They identify key areas that contribute to low retention rates such as inadequate admissions standards and SAT scores; limited or inadequate financial support; poor pre-college preparation; scarce pre- and post-admission advising and academic support; inadequate outreach or extra-curricular opportunities.

Most importantly, we found that all retention plans and research sources call for a comprehensive, university-wide approach. In particular, a first step in the process should involve a thorough assessment of the reasons that students are leaving the target institution. For example, a major three-decade study conducted by ACT recommends a “systematic analysis of the characteristics of your students” and “institutional characteristics” to identify specific needs and priorities. (“What works in student retention?” ACT Research Report <<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/AllInstitutions.pdf>>)

The following suggestions are based on information obtained from the combined efforts and processes noted above:

I. Student Retention

- a. Follow up on orientation data of students who do/do not enroll in subsequent semesters.
- b. Collect student retention and failure data correlated with SAT scores and student’s programs of study in high school.

- c. Collect exit data on students who don't complete their degree. Conduct exit interviews and/or surveys when possible with students who drop out, beyond limited data currently available from the Enrollment Retention Management Council (ERMC).
- d. Track students through the First Year Reading Project to assess numbers and reasons that they do not continue at FGCU.

II. Suggested institutional-level actions to increase student success and retention:

- a. Create a greater role, and numbers of, undergraduate advisors. Current advisor to student ratios are much too high for advisors to adequately monitor early warning signs of undergraduates' academic difficulties. Advisors would be valuable in helping students who are failing to identify obstacles to their success and future actions and services to help remedy current problems toward future goal attainment.
- b. The University could develop an official student success plan and a probation plan.
- c. Expand on the First Year Reading Initiative and other methods to identify those students who may require early mentoring. Develop a mentoring program.
- d. College-specific curriculum teams should review the balance of students' work across each semester, including General Education courses, and consider inserting appropriate standards for balance and consistency of assignment workload with the course of study.
- e. University Admission standards: After early attempts at enrollment, the University could consider raising admission standards for undergraduates vis-à-vis SAT scores and other predictive measures.

III. Suggestions for Faculty

- a. Recommends that Faculty adhere to University policy which stipulates that final comprehensive exams should be given only during designated Final Exam week.
- b. Suggests that Faculty provide students with regular feedback on their progress.
- c. Suggests that faculty remind students of resources available for assistance such as The Writing Center, CAPS, Library Workshops, and Adaptive Services as appropriate.