



Student Success Initiative

Wayne State University has committed to a concerted and coordinated effort to improve student success and student learning, increase retention and graduation rates, and narrow achievement gaps. This initiative has twelve major thrusts, which are described here.

The first six thrusts were funded and initiated as part of the WSU Retention Implementation Plan, launched in 2012.

(1) **Undergraduate Academic Advising Initiative.** This initiative provided funding for hiring of 45 new professional academic advisors on campus, approximately doubling our institutional advising capacity and bringing our student/advising ratios into alignment with national best practice.

Following an external consultant review, a broad variety of stakeholders convened to undertake a formal strategic planning exercise, resulting in new vision and mission statements, and establishment of advising goals. These efforts are informing the development of student and advisor learning outcomes, an advising syllabus and institution-wide training programs. This will enable development of shared advisor performance evaluation and alignment of advising programs in the schools, colleges, and departments with the university advising mission. New administrative structures support the coordination of the advising mission and promote professional development for new and seasoned advisors. This shared planning has directed the development of new technology, reporting mechanisms, and academic policy. New programs are under development to support the advising of students who are at risk for attrition and whose needs span multiple colleges, including undecided students, veteran students, pre-health students, transfer students, and others. Finally, new models for faculty advising are planned and professional development opportunities for faculty advisors will be created.

(2) **General Education Review.** Wayne State University has had a University-wide Program in General Education since 1987 for all undergraduate students pursuing bachelor's degrees regardless of their academic specialties. These requirements contribute to the goal of ensuring that all students have the basic skills fundamental to success in college while simultaneously achieving the intellectual breadth necessary to place specialized and professional curricula in proper perspective. However, a preliminary review of our General Education Program suggests several challenges. These include an excess of requirements beyond the norm for institutions like ours, and poor articulation with our local community colleges as well as with our own college, program and major requirements. The requirements appear confusing to our students, faculty, staff and other stakeholders. In focusing on meeting college readiness goals, we have inadequately capitalized on our position as an urban research university.

We are currently in the early planning stage for a review and revision of our General Education Program. While we are just beginning to establish a process and the general parameters, we plan to move toward a General Education Program that lays the foundations for lifelong learning and better meets the needs of both employers and a civic democracy, perhaps building on the AACU LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise).

(3) **Support for Teaching and Learning.** In 2013, Wayne State University began a restructuring and reinvigorating of the Office for Teaching and Learning. This effort emphasized the central role of the OTL as a source of expertise, advocacy, and support for teaching and learning, as well as a clarification. A new Associate Provost and Director for the OTL was hired who has extensive experience in and a reputation for faculty and instructional development. By positioning the new leader as an associate provost, the administration has demonstrated how strongly it values teaching and learning. The staffing and resources of the Office for Teaching and Learning were increased to enable expansion of both services and impact.

A new collaboration, the Faculty Teaching Commons, will be launched in Fall 2013, demonstrating renewed strengthening of the relationships between the OTL and the various other units involved in instruction and faculty support, including Computing and Information Technology, Library and Information Systems, and the Office for Online Education. Upgrades to the physical spaces for learning include a new suite of six classrooms



and five seminar rooms that provide technology support and flexible configurations for active and group learning.

These enhancements are planned to support and enable other organizational initiatives to support teaching and learning and to align this support with our retention and student success goals. These include examination of the reward system for teaching, continued improvement of academic support services, professional development of graduate students, development programs for deans and chairs, and institutional and program assessment, and diversity and climate initiatives.

(4) **Readiness for College.** Nationally, as access to college becomes a national priority, fewer students are coming to college meeting college readiness benchmarks and prepared for the rigor of a post-secondary education. Increasingly, remediating this gap is the challenge of colleges and universities who must simultaneously meet retention and graduation rate goals. This challenge has become particularly acute at Wayne State University, where we have long had a mission of access and opportunities. To address this challenge, we have enhanced and expanded many of our support programs. In particular, the Academic Pathways to Excellence (APEX) Scholars program now offers a Summer Bridge Program that provides an opportunity for 132 students to earn up to 8 college credits in a free, supported, residential environment before joining Wayne State University in the fall, increasing their college readiness and giving them a head start on academic success.

(5) **Expanded First Year Experiences.** The transition into the first year and the first year of college are critical to student success. WSU has been making investments into the first year experience for many years, in the form of learning communities, enhanced orientation programs, curriculum enhancements and other forms of support. As a result, our FTIAC retention into the second year has increased from 69% to 77% from 2006 to 2010. We are building on this success by expansion of learning communities (see below), a further expanded orientation program with “success sessions” and development of supported “exploratory paths” for students who are undecided about their major.

(6) **Expansion of Financial Aid.** For students in need of financial assistance, Wayne State University has recently increased its financial aid by \$6.2 million, or 11 percent for the 2013-2014 year. The University's institutionally funded aid now is \$62.2 million, a 231 percent increase since 2002 and a 78 percent increase since 2007. More than 80 percent of all Wayne State undergraduate students receive some form of need- or merit-based financial aid. We are exploring and piloting various approaches to use financial aid to support degree attainment in more direct ways, while maintaining our mission of access.

(7) **GRAD: Greater Retention and Achievement through Diversity.** To build on our historical commitment to educational opportunity, WSU committed in July 2013 to launch to Greater Retention and Achievement through Diversity initiative, which aims to increase our retention and graduation rates for students of color and other under-represented groups and to advance a mission of inclusive excellence. This strategic initiative funds the creation of a multicultural student success center as well as a campus diversity and culture study. Further, it calls for further strategic planning to lead to the creation of a chief diversity officer position and an Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

(8) **Big Data and Student Success.** WSU has embarked on a program to use “big data”, analytics and machine learning to uncover patterns in data that influence desired outcomes. Early results have been interesting, and are helping us discover student success factors that had not been considered before.

(9) **Community College/Transfer Student Initiative.** Two years ago, the University launched a major outreach initiative to strengthen its ties with community colleges and develop more strategic partnerships in order to facilitate the students' transition from the community college to the university and provide them with clear pathways for the completion of a four-year degree. Activities under the initiative include expanding articulation agreements, developing a reverse transfer process, developing a transfer student orientation, and creating opportunities for university and community college faculty to engage around curriculum alignment, effective teaching, and practices that alleviate/eliminate barriers to student success. These activities will culminate in the development of a Transfer Center, which will serve as a model for a comprehensive, multi-layered and integrated approach to recruiting, education, and supporting transfer students.



(10) **High Impact Educational Experiences.** Wayne State University has made many investments in High Impact Educational Experiences – learning practices and environments that have been shown to most effective in contributing to student engagement, motivation, deep learning, and long-term student success. These investments, which include the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, the Learning Communities Program, and Service Learning, also disproportionately benefit students of color, economically disadvantaged students, and first generation students. As a consequence, they are essential to our Student Success Initiative, and to our mission. Not only have we expanded the funding and support for these in initiatives, but also, in collaboration with our Office for Teaching and Learning (see above), we are increasing the level of faculty awareness and engagement and our intentionality about those characteristics that are most supportive of student success.

(11) **Pre-College Collaborative.** WSU has more than 50 in-school and out-of-school, school year and summer programs that provide educational experiences for pre-college students. These programs are delivered by a variety of units, schools and colleges and programs throughout WSU. During 2013, the providers of these programs organized into a Pre-college collaborative to share best practices and develop the capacity of these programs to support college access, readiness, and success within our local communities.

(12) **Strategic Graduation Action Project.** In Fall 2012, the university adopted a goal oriented, data-driven, collaborative approach to increasing its six-year graduation rate. A working committee, consisting of representatives from our undergraduate schools and colleges, academic advising, student success, enrollment management and student financials, met regularly to establish goals, analyze data, identify problems, review progress and share strategies. The committee's working plan consisted of a single page matrix of retention and graduation outcomes and goals for the first-time, full-time undergraduates who entered the university between Fall 2007 and Fall 2012. For the current Fall 2007 cohort, the committee's intervention consisted of contacting each student who had not yet applied for graduation to encourage them to do so by registering and completing final course requirements. Additionally, the committee identified students who were very close to graduation but who had stopped-out due to a variety of financial issues. In the latter case, students were called and offered a payment plan and/or private scholarship aid to clear past due balances to allow them to re-enroll and complete their degree. Beginning in March, the committee also analyzed the Fall 2008 cohort and started calling these students to advise and support them in completing their degree by August 2014. All in all, these pro-active interventions were very successful as the university met its Fall 2007 six-year graduation goal of 32%; this represents a 4% gain over last year's 28.1% graduation rate. The university plans to scale this data-drive, pro-active, collaborative approach to other student groups in hopes of enhancing outcomes and mitigating achievement gaps in other student groups.