

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS FORUM



Improving Upper-Class Engagement and Retention: Academic and Co-Curricular Strategies

Custom Research Brief

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January

2013

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I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

Improving Academic Components: After the first year, what crucial points of intervention influence student retention? What policies or programs do other institutions employ to promote completion of general education requirements, timely major declaration, and overall credit accumulation? How have other universities engaged faculty to redesign courses that ultimately increase student success? How do other faculty and administrators determine the appropriate course sequence to introduce next-level and advanced content at the optimal time?

Encouraging Co-Curricular Engagement: What intentional signature programs have other universities implemented that blend academic study and participation in high-impact co-curricular activities in the sophomore and upper-class years? Which divisions and staff are responsible for development and implementation of these initiatives, and what outcomes have they achieved? What strategies do other institutions employ to improve collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs to promote student engagement and retention (as time permits)?

Project Sources The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries, including:
 - Education Advisory Board. “Course Redesign: Minimizing Drop, Failure, and Withdrawal Rates.” (2010)
 - Education Advisory Board. “Examining Course Withdrawal Timelines.” (2010)
- Institutional web sites
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (<http://nces.ed.gov>)
- Graunke, Steven S., and Sherry Woosley. "An Exploration of the Factors that Affect the Academic Success of College Sophomores." *College Student Journal*. Vol 29. no. 2 (2005): 367-377.
- Jensen, U. “Factors Influencing Student Retention in Higher Education. Summary of Influential Factors in Degree Attainment and Persistence to Career or Further Education for At-Risk/High Educational Need Student.” *Pacific Policy Research Center*. Honolulu, HI: Kamehameha Schools–Research & Evaluation Division.
- Jeremy, Offenstien, Moore Colleen, and Schulock Nancy. *Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy and The Education Trust*, "Advancing by Degrees: A Framework for Increasing College Completion ." Last modified 2010. Accessed November 2012. http://www.csus.edu/ihelp/PDFs/R_AdvbyDegrees_0510.pdf.
- Kuh, G. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Nes., L.S., Evans, D.R., and S.C. Segerstrom. “Optimism and college retention: Mediation by motivations, performance, and adjustment.” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 39(8): 1887-1912.
- Nicpon, M., Huser, L., Blanks, E., Sollenberger, S., Befort, C., and S. Kurpius. “The relationship of loneliness and social support with college freshmen’s academic performance and persistence.” *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(3): 345-358.
- “Student Flow Analysis: CSU Students Progress Toward Graduation” *Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy* (2009).



- Tinto, V. Linking learning and leaving. In *Reworking the student departure puzzle* ed. J. M. Braxton. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators at the following institutions:

A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Region	Carnegie Classification	Approximate Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Type
University A	Mountain West	Research Universities (very high research activity)	23,000/30,000	Public
University B	Northeast	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)	9,800/12,000	Public
University C	South	Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)	5,000/5,700	Private
University D	South	Research Universities (high research activity)	33,000/42,000	Public
University E	Midwest	Research Universities (high research activity)	22,000/30,000	Public
University F	Midwest	Research Universities (high research activity)	20,000/26,000	Public
University G	Pacific West	Research Universities (very high research activity)	19,000/23,000	Public
University H	Northeast	Research Universities (very high research activity)	27,000/37,000	Public
University I	Northeast	Research Universities (high research activity)	11,000/14,000	Public
University J	Midwest	Research Universities (very high research activity)	24,000/32,000	Public

Source: National Center for Education Statistics



II. Executive Overview

Key Observations While many institutions have focused on retention of students through the first year, a growing number of university administrators are realizing equal numbers of students depart the university in the sophomore and subsequent years. Late or inappropriate major declaration, poor academic performance in early and foundational coursework, and failure to complete program requirements all contribute to attrition.

Universities should incorporate active learning components into courses with at least 25 percent drop, failure, and withdrawal (DFW) rates that serve as gateways to future courses in a program of study. Critically sequential courses in math, science, and composition often feature large sections and offer few opportunities to review content in smaller groups; these courses often disproportionately result in DFWs. EAB research reveals that redesigning content and delivery can halve the DFW rates of some math and science courses. When full course redesigns are not feasible, administrators should offer and encourage supplementary instruction on learning effectiveness into high-enrollment, high-failure courses; contacts at **University A** they found that students who access these resources improved their grades by one full letter, even when controlling for previous academic achievement

Students are also often stalled by limited enrollment capacity in critical courses, conflicting course schedules, bursar holds for trivial outstanding balances, and lack of information about registration. Contacts at **University F** acknowledge that chairs in related departments (e.g., biology and chemistry) rarely coordinate the scheduling of entry-level offerings that many students require in the same semester.

Many profiled institutions do not stringently enforce policies that require students to declare a major by 45 credits; as a result, many students do not declare majors in a timely manner, directly impacting their ability to graduate in four years. Contacts at **University D** identified a 30 percent gap in likelihood to graduate on time between students who declare a major within the first two years and students who do not.

However, inappropriate major selection can also prolong time to graduation; many students persist for too long in academic subjects incompatible with their talents and interest without advisor intervention. Many universities are performing statistical analysis to identify leading indicators and milestones that predict student likelihood succeed in a certain major based on past performance. Advisors deploy this information to conduct development conversations about major selection before students select a major they are statistically very unlikely to complete.

Students denied from limited-capacity majors often become directionless, departing from the university or enrolling in nonproductive credit hours. **University J** created a health sciences major to capture and redirect the two-thirds of students who apply and are rejected from admission to the nursing school; students in this program can complete an accelerated fifteen-month bachelor's in nursing after graduation or go on to pursue study or employment in health administration, public health, or other allied fields.

While most universities fail to assess student affairs programming to determine effectiveness, multiple profiled universities encountered positive academic achievement and retention outcomes from structured co-curricular learning communities and class cohorts. Even after controlling for background and prior academic preparation, administrators at **University A** and **University E** found that students involved in particular co-curricular programs persisted at rates between five and 20 percent higher than students not involved in those programs. However, this analysis does not control for self-selection or intrinsic motivation.



III. Review of Retention Research

Identified Factors that Contribute to Student Persistence

Scholarly Literature Highlights Key Factors that Impact Student Retention, but Actionable Solutions Difficult to Scale

Substantial literature identifies retention factors: Higher education scholars have devoted significant attention to student retention, persistence, and graduation. Their research over the last few decades has highlighted a number of elements that significantly impact students' abilities to succeed and decisions to stay at the university:

A review of multiple sources reveals several factors that contribute to retention¹:

- **academic performance** (e.g., college GPA, credits earned, student self-discipline),
 - **attitudes and satisfaction** (e.g., positive opinions about the value of college, sense of belonging, social connectedness),
 - **individual factors** (e.g. socioeconomic status, financial resources), and
 - **institutional factors** (e.g., cultural climate, support from staff and faculty, ease of navigating institutional resources).
- One leading study focused on second-years found that the following are significant predictors of *sophomore* retention: **commitment to major, satisfaction with faculty interaction, academic engagement, and general student satisfaction.**

However, the conclusions of peer-reviewed and scholarly studies are often difficult to incorporate into institutional policy. The decentralized nature of university governance and limited financial resources further constrain administrators' abilities to implement changes that impact the factors listed above.

Most Significant Predictors of Persistence Include Credit Accumulation in the First Two Years, Success in Early Coursework, and Timely Major Declaration

Many university administrators seeking retention gains have thus focused on optimizing student choices that affect academic progress and credit accumulation, which indicate positive progress toward graduation. The experiences of profiled institutions mirror national studies, such as a recent analysis by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy (IHELP) of students in two of the nation's largest university systems, which identify the importance of certain milestones that contribute to positive student outcomes. The following three developmental checkpoints reportedly build momentum towards persistence:

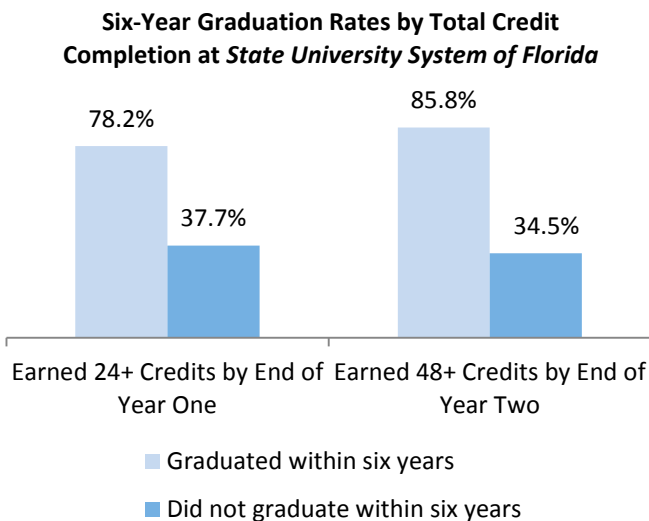
1. Nes., L.S., Evans, D.R., and S.C. Segerstrom. "Optimism and college retention: Mediation by motivations, performance, and adjustment." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 39(8): 1887-1912; Tinto, V.. *Linking learning and leaving*. In *Reworking the student departure puzzle* ed. J. M. Braxton. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press; Nicpon, M., Huser, L., Blanks, E., Sollenberger, S., Befort, C., and S. Kurpius. "The relationship of loneliness and social support with college freshmen's academic performance and persistence." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(3): 345-358; Jensen, U. "Factors Influencing Student Retention in Higher Education. Summary of Influential Factors in Degree Attainment and Persistence to Career or Further Education for At-Risk/High Educational Need Student." Pacific Policy Research Center. Honolulu, HI: Kamehameha Schools—Research & Evaluation Division

2. Graunke, Steven S., and Sherry Woosley. "An Exploration of the Factors that Affect the Academic Success of College Sophomores." *College Student Journal*. Vol 29. no. 2 (2005): 367-377.

Key Academic Checkpoints toward Student Persistence and Timely Graduation¹

Early Credit Accumulation

Evidence from IHELP Research

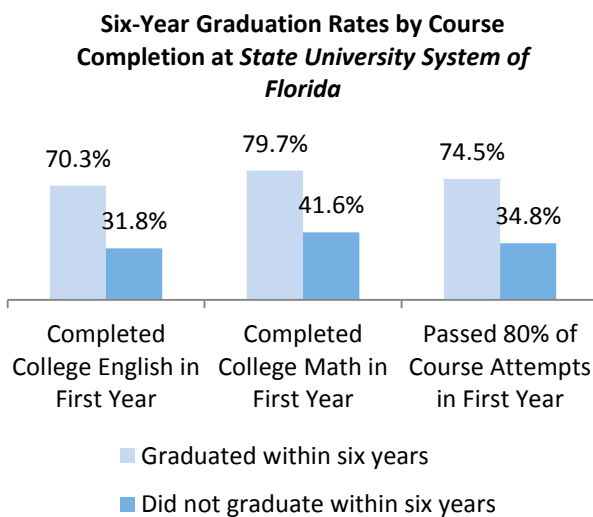


Evidence from Profiled Institution

Institutional researchers at **University A** found that **students who successfully completed 30 credit hours in the first year increased likelihood of graduation by 40 to 46 percent** (not inclusive of Advanced Placement courses). This was consistent across all combinations of academic foci and demographics. Conversely, students who complete less than 24 credits in the freshman year and 48 in the sophomore year are at extremely high risk of failure to persist.

Early Success in Foundational Coursework

Evidence from IHELP Research



Evidence from Profiled Institution

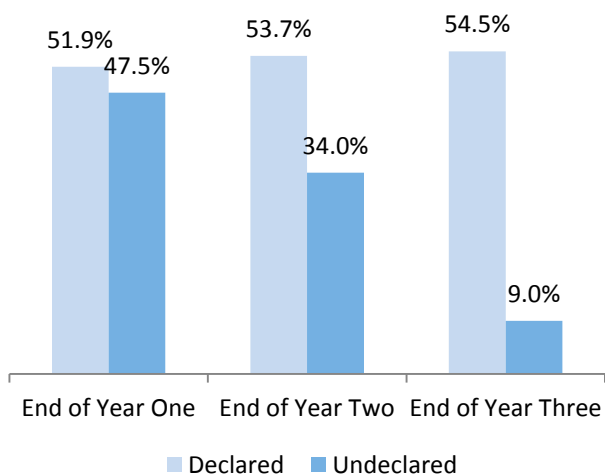
Institutional researchers at **University A** found that **each course failed, dropped, or withdrawn decreases likelihood of graduation by 8 to 12 percent among typical first-year sequential courses**. This effective is cumulative: two failed courses can reduce probability of graduation by nearly a quarter. Timing is also critical: a first semester course fail diminishes students' odds most significantly, whereas a sophomore withdrawal has slightly less impact.

¹ Offenstein, J., C. Moore, and N. Shulock. "Advancing by Degrees: A Framework for Increasing College Completion" *Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy and The Education Trust* (2010); "Student Flow Analysis: CSU Students Progress Toward Graduation" *Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy* (2009)

Early Major Declaration

Evidence from IHELP Research

Six-Year Graduation Rates by Timing of Major Declaration at *California State University System*



Evidence from Profiled Institution

Institutional researchers at **University D** found that **students who declared a major in the first two years graduated at a rate of 77%**, whereas students who did not graduated at a rate of about 40%. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies there refers to this potentially dangerous period between entry to the university and major declaration as the “Bermuda Triangle.”

Contacts Caution against Emphasis on the Sophomore Year Alone

“Some freshmen hit the same wall that sophomores do, some sophomores hit the same walls that juniors do. We try to look at the underlying issues and what we can do to provide support, systems, and strategies. It is about a continuum from when you start college.”

- Forum Interview

IV. Reducing Course Drop, Failure, and Withdrawal Rates

Ensuring Optimal Course Selection *Major Maps and Clear Course Sequencing Structure Curriculum Planning*

EAB research indicates that many students are not aware of the course sequence required for their program of study. To combat this problem, many institutions have created detailed resources to clearly indicate course sequences. These sequences detail specific recommended courses; for example, rather than list only a social science requirement, a guide may recommend that a student enroll in Sociology 101.

University D and **University F** both adopted technology platforms to generate a customized degree sequence to which each student must adhere. These electronic degree maps perform two functions:

- 1 **Create a custom degree plan:**
Systems apply previous credits and courses to majors of choice to create a semester-by-semester outline of a student's course of study. Contacts at **University F** note that creating a four-year plan has always been the responsibility of advisors, a process which electronic systems simply facilitate. As these responsibilities become automated, contacts are beginning to evaluate advisors on the performance of students who they advise.
- 2 **Facilitate student follow-through:** **University D's** system contains five tiers of responses for deviating from the major plan based on the significance of the divergence (e.g., from merely enrolling in a nonproductive course to dropping or failing a crucial gateway course). Responses include sending the student a warning message, triggering an advisor appointment, or completely blocking the student from accessing course registration. The goal is to teach students to self-advise, allowing advisors to prioritize developmental conversations.

Building an Electronic Degree Map

University D built an in-house system, whereas **University F** is developing its system in conjunction with Ellucian's Degree Works software that is integrated with the Banner enterprise resource planning system. **University G** deploys a less-intensive variant of Degree Works to allow students to perform "what-if" calculations to understand which majors best correspond to achieved credits.

Encourage Early Foundational Math, Science, and Composition Courses

Many universities have begun to emphasize the completion of foundational course sequences early in a student's undergraduate career, while continuing to require distributional general education requirements. EAB research and contacts indicate that the early achievement of credits not only generates momentum (sometimes referred to as "credit velocity"), but also provides a knowledge base for further learning. This is especially critical in STEM fields in which subsequent learning builds on basic principles across math and science.

Strategies to Encourage Foundational Courses in the First Two Years

Mandate	Recommend
University G now requires that all students complete math, science, and composition requirements in the first year, and a second composition requirement in the sophomore year. While the policy was implemented too recently to meaningfully evaluate, contacts believe it has increased the readiness of students to succeed in subsequent courses.	Advisors at University A encourage students to complete foundational courses in the first and second year, but have not pursued a mandate in order to avoid debate over academic policy. Multiple institutions now require students to meet with their advisor at least once a semester before they may enroll in the following semester's courses.

Encouraging, Rather Than Compelling, Foundational Courses Early

“If you explain *why* this makes sense, you are engaging students in the development of higher order learning skills during advising, which is useful, instead of just getting them to do something because they have to do it, which is less useful.”

- Forum Interview

Remove Burdens to Optimal Course Enrollment

Students may fail to enroll in the correct courses for a number of reasons, but the following emerge as strategies to ensure students enroll in the right amount and correct courses:

Strategies to Facilitate Optimal Course Enrollment

Remind students of registration holds

At the beginning of the semester, administrators at **University J** generate a list of all students with account holds that will prevent them from registering for courses for the next semester. They share this with advisors, who contact students twice before the enrollment period opens to remind them that they must pay outstanding fees to register. If students do not enroll or enroll in insufficient credits, their advisors contact them again.

Reduce trivial impediments to registration

EAB research indicates that many financial hold policies originate from past due balances of as little as one dollar, or from other non-academic fees such as parking or library fees. While these holds encourage students to pay the fees, they generate confusion and prevent students from enrolling in their required and first-choice courses before they close.

Offer sufficient sections

Capacity limits on class sizes or a lack of available sections often prevent students from enrolling in required courses. Administrators at **University F** and **University A** have invested significant resources in ensuring the availability of multiple open and non-conflicting sections of common first- and second-year courses, which contacts report has positively impacted credit achievement for many students. This has proven especially effective in fields where students must enroll in courses from several various departments (such as biology and chemistry) that have not typically coordinated scheduling.

Increasing Course Completion

Redesign Courses with High Drop, Failure, and Withdrawal (DFW) Rates

After identifying the courses that contribute disproportionately to drops, failures, and withdrawals, some universities have redesigned these courses to foster student success. These courses often include high-enrollment, high-failure course sequences across composition, math, and science. These redesigns encompass both content and delivery and integrate learner-based pedagogical components that allow students to proceed at a self-determined pace. Some refer to these pedagogical tactics as active learning. Redesign components may include the following¹:

Previous EAB research indicates that course redesign can produce dramatic effects, even halving the DFW rates in some math and science courses.

- **Emporium model in math classes** in which students complete online modules in a computer lab staffed by tutors and professors;
- **Experiential learning**, such as a field trip to a location relevant to the material;
- **Interactive technology**, such as clickers that allow professors to quickly survey class comprehension on a topic before moving to other content;
- **Small-group recitations** led by a teaching assistant allow students to study and ask questions regarding the content shared during lectures;
- **Videos** that show an instructor working out a problem or reviewing a specific concept with visual examples that students can review at their own pace

Strategies to Target and Redesign High DFW Courses

Target high impact courses

Initially, administrators should focus on courses that lose at least 25 percent of those enrolled due to drop, failure, or withdrawal; courses that enroll at least one hundred students; and courses that serve as key curricular gateways or prerequisites for future study. Administrators may prioritize fall semester courses to promote early positive performance among first-year students.

Emphasize role of faculty members

Faculty control of the curriculum necessitates incentivizing faculty involvement in redesign efforts. Administrators issue an internal request for proposal to the university community with an associated grant for the redesign of a particular course or course area, so that faculty can elect to participate. Contacts at multiple universities find that junior faculty are often more receptive to course redesign.

Publicize measurable results

Faculty pilot a course redesign with one section to assess its effectiveness compared to a control group, and present their results to fellow faculty at department meetings. Some faculty members publish results in disciplinary-specific pedagogical journals. Universities can also sponsor internal conferences or academies to disseminate innovative methods.

Offer incentives

Central academic affairs offices often fund course redesign efforts; some offer \$10,000 to \$15,000 grants or one- or two-semester course releases. In cases where course redesign incorporating technology may save the department money, departments are often allowed to retain the savings. Universities also often make available instructional design staff for faculty consultation.

The Provost's office often provides necessary curriculum redevelopment funds for RFPs. Senior leadership justifies involvement in curricular matters because chief academic officers often integrate active learning redesign efforts into quality enhancement plans required by accrediting bodies, including the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

¹ Education Advisory Board. "Course Redesign: Minimizing Drop, Failure, and Withdrawal Rates." (2010)

Offer Supplemental Learning Opportunities

Research conducted by the Department of Math at **University A** revealed that students in Calculus for Physical Scientists who engaged in additional learning opportunities earned one full letter grade higher than those that did not – even when controlling for prior academic achievement. The department shares this finding with students to further promote programs.

Especially when course redesign is not feasible (e.g., due to faculty resistance or lack of funding), administrators should also consider supplementing a traditional course with additional learning opportunities, such as study skill seminars, extra tutoring sections, additional quizzes or readings to aid comprehension, or increased access to faculty. Contacts at **University A** find that educating students about the psychology of learning, analytical reasoning, and critical thinking increased their ability to succeed in class and proved more impactful than additional exercises of writing or technical skills. Contacts encourage students to access these supplementation learning opportunities through the following strategies:

- **Positive messaging:** Contacts at **University A** explain that terms such as “study skills workshops” or “remediation” can imply condescension toward students. After titling these programs as “learning effectiveness training” and ensuring that instructors deploy this messaging consistently in class, the number of students accessing these programs increased from 2,000 to over 11,000 over a four year period.
- **Integration into academic plans for students on probation:** Students on academic probation or warning at **University B** must sign a contract with their advisor to complete a series of additional learning opportunities to avoid dismissal.

Alter Policies to Limit Course Withdrawal

EAB research determines that 60 percent of the way through the semester (i.e., about 9 weeks into a fifteen-week semester) is a common deadline for course withdrawal that also conforms to Department of Education financial aid policies.¹ While some institutions seek to shift this deadline to reduce withdrawals, contacts institutions more often limit the number of courses from which students can withdraw through academic policy or facilitate more informed student decision-making regarding course withdrawals.

Advantages of Various Course Withdrawal Deadlines

Earlier Course Deadlines	Later Course Deadlines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage mental commitment: Earlier deadlines compel students to commit to course completion rather than reserve the option to drop at any time, which also encourages responsible course selection. • Facilitate future academic planning: Earlier deadlines reduce prolonged uncertainty about current course schedules, which can hinder effective long-term planning. • Avoid interfering with other administrative processes: Earlier deadlines do not disrupt course registration for subsequent semesters or determination of graduation eligibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to better determine potential success in a course: Later deadlines offer students time to gauge initial performance in a course, which permits optimal decision-making about their ability to succeed. • Promote achievement in future course attempts: Later deadlines expose students to additional course content which may improve their likelihood of success in a second course attempt.

¹ Education Advisory Board. “Examining Course Withdrawal Timelines.” (2010)

Additional Strategies to Reduce Course Withdrawals

Limit number of withdrawals from a single course	<p>Some institutions allow students to withdraw and re-enroll the same course only <i>three times</i>, after which they must receive advisor or instructor permissions to enroll in or withdraw from the course.</p>
Limit total number of withdrawals over undergraduate career	<p>Some universities allow students a limited number of withdrawals (often <i>seven to ten</i>) during their entire undergraduate careers. Contacts report this balance of flexibility and constraint contributes to the development of sound cognitive decision-making.</p>
Inform students of negative impacts of course withdrawal	<p>Contacts at several institutions direct students who attempt to withdraw from a course to an electronic notification about the potential consequences of withdrawal on satisfactory academic progress and financial aid eligibility before submitting their withdrawal.</p>
Offer tuition refunds on a sliding scale	<p>Some contact institutions also refund tuition for withdrawn courses on a sliding scale to discourage course drops later in the semester.</p>

V. Enhancing Academic Engagement through High-Impact Practices

Encouraging Student Involvement *Prioritize Evidence-based Engagement Programs*

Many universities prioritize academic and co-curricular experiences that have been labeled “high-impact,” based on an influential study by higher education scholar George Kuh, later endorsed in full by the Association of American Colleges and Universities¹. Dr. Kuh identified high-impact programs as those whose development impact was verified by student responses on the National Survey of Student Engagement. Such practices include the following:

Commonly Cited “High-Impact” Practices

- First-year seminars and experiences
- Common intellectual experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing-intensive courses
- Undergraduate research
- Exposure to diversity
- Global learning
- Collaborative and team-based assignments

¹ Kuh, G. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.



However, Profiled Institutions Rarely Evaluate Co-Curriculum beyond Participation

While universities often implement the above practices to improve student engagement, administrators rarely prioritize their assessment at the institution. Staff across most institutions track student participation, although evaluation linking specific programs to achievement or retention outcomes does not typically occur. Contacts identify several barriers to robust assessment efforts:

- **Skepticism:** Many student affairs professionals express skepticism about causation analysis that would overcome the challenges of self-selection in demonstrating program impact.
- **Technology:** Administrators should create assessment processes before implementing new programs to ensure that tracking systems easily interface with enterprise resource planning systems that house student academic data. Technology incompatibility has stymied data collection and evaluation efforts at **University C** and **University E**.
- **Resources:** Universities often lack the time, staff, resources, or expertise to conduct sophisticated assessment.

Analyzing Participation Data

Participation data cannot determine program effectiveness, but paired with demographic data or academic major, it may help staff understand gaps in the availability of opportunities. For example, analysis may reveal that nursing students often engage in service-learning, but rarely in study abroad, which may cause staff to create specially tailored programs to meet their needs.

At **University E**, central academic affairs issues an internal request for proposals for faculty to ask for course redevelopment funds to incorporate RISE components. Last year, 18 faculty members submitted applications and seven received funding.

Create Structured Pathways to Ease and Incentivize Participation

Many universities organize offerings of high-impact practices into categories or tracks to inspire students to participate in multiple opportunities. While programs vary across institutions, they tend to share common characteristics:

- **Complement co-curricular activities with credit-bearing courses:** These courses are often incorporated into general education or college core requirements to seamlessly blend academic and co-curricular pursuits. Course registration is also easy to track and is verifiable, whereas student self-reporting may be inaccurate.
- **Decentralized implementation:** Central administrators or a committee determine broad program structure and delegate to colleges and other units for the development of specific offerings. Unit leaders with area expertise often consult with faculty to assist them in incorporating relevant components into courses. For example, the center for community service may collaborate with a physical education professor to execute a program through which course participants mentor local citizens in a fast-walking exercise regime.
- **Centralized support from enrollment services:** The registrar and institutional research offices help track student participation and generate co-curricular transcripts. At **University E**, for example, students who participate in activities in at least two of four established programmatic categories receive a special designation on their transcript. Inclusion of co-curricular involvement in student records also allows academic advisors to reference student experiences for advising.

Characteristics of Select Co-Curricular Pathway Programs

<i>President's Promise</i> at University H	<i>R.I.S.E to the UNIVERSITY E Challenge</i> at University E	<i>Experiences Transcript</i> at University C
<i>The President's Promise</i> encourages students to participate in high-impact experiential learning opportunities.	<i>The "R.I.S.E." to the UNIVERSITY E Challenge</i> is an incentive program that encourages students to complete one experience in each of four categories.	The <i>University C Experiences Transcript</i> tracks students' experiential activities across five signature categories, which are transcribed alongside other academic records.
Categories of Experiential Learning		
Eligible programming includes <i>living-learning communities, international experiences, research, internships, leadership education, and service-learning</i> ; these categories are not exhaustive and other experiences may qualify for inclusion.	The four categories correspond to the program title: <i>Research, International, Service, and Experiential</i> .	The five categories of the transcript include <i>Leadership Development, Service Learning, Internships/Co-ops, Study Abroad/Intercultural Experiences, and Student Undergraduate Research</i> .
Participation Requirements		
While no student must participate in <i>President's Promise</i> activities, <i>many colleges require courses that include eligible experiences</i> (e.g., many colleges currently require students to complete internships). Contacts note that many students participate through first-year learning communities, which are very popular at the University H.	When faculty balked at the University mandating completion of the RISE categories, the University opted to frame it as an optional challenge. However, <i>several colleges have integrated courses into the core curriculum that meet each of the requirements</i> , in effect facilitating all students to complete the challenge.	University C's general education curriculum includes the Experiential Learning Requirement (ELR); <i>many courses and programs which fulfill this requisite will also appear on the Experiences Transcript</i> .
Program Leader		
<i>An Associate Director in the University Career Center</i> promotes the <i>President's Promise</i> initiative as part of her job description. Her position is funded by the Provost's office. The Associate Director often presents at staff meetings across the university to encourage academic advisors to incorporate <i>President's Promise</i> activities into a student's four-year plan.	<i>The Associate Vice Chancellor in the Office of Academic Affairs</i> chaired the committee that led program development and continues to oversee its execution (though oversight is not a formal responsibility of the position).	<i>The Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs</i> acts as the student contact for printed copies of the transcript. He also leads occasional working groups and fosters discussion among staff regarding the program, but this is a minor portion of his overall job description. The Director of Technology Applications also oversees the associated database.
Integration with Academic Coursework		
<i>The vast majority of eligible experiences are credit-bearing because most co-curricular experiences carry some credit</i> : for example, internships, research, and learning communities all award credit to participants. The few non-credit experiences that qualify are structured service-learning experiences.	<i>All eligible experiences are credit-bearing</i> because all experiences are integrated into the curricula of a particular course; students partake in experiences by registering for the appropriate courses.	While the ELR integrated into the general education curriculum fulfills many categories that qualify for inclusion on the <i>Experiences Transcript</i> , <i>the transcript may include both curricular and co-curricular experiences so long as a staff or faculty member validates them</i> .
Eligibility of Experiences		



<p><i>The Associate Director determines which experiences meet criteria. Contacts emphasize that experiences must be staff- or faculty-directed; that is, self-initiated community service or election as a leader of a student organization is not sufficient to meet standards for inclusion. Instead, students must engage in a leadership workshop facilitated through the student activities office or a service-learning course with a robust reflection component.</i></p>	<p><i>Each college curriculum committee determines if their courses meet the RISE learning outcomes outlined by central administration. While standards differ by category, they emphasize learning and reflection over participation or achievement. Administrators are currently auditing all RISE-approved courses to determine adherence to central guidelines and will make necessary adjustments to ensure program coherency and integrity.</i></p>	<p>Contacts emphasize that <i>experiences must be experiential in nature</i>; that is, attendance at a leadership conference would not count for inclusion, but holding a leadership position in a student organization would qualify.</p>
<p>Distribution of Responsibilities</p>		
<p><i>Experiences across academic colleges and student affairs units contribute to categories of the President's Promise. The administrator responsible for a particular program must record student participation in a central President's Promise database.</i></p>	<p><i>The Registrar tracks student accumulation of courses which carry the Research, International, Services, or Experiential designation.</i></p>	<p><i>Relevant staff and faculty across the University maintain responsibility for adding items to a student's Experiences Transcript. For example, staff in the Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement record all participation in university-planned service activities and approve and document any student-initiated experience. The Center for Leadership annually records the positions of students in registered student organizations and solicits lists from other university departments to add as well (e.g., team captains from athletics staff).</i></p>

Fostering Peer Support *Learning Communities and Class Cohorts Provide Student Support Networks*

While universities deploy high-impact practices to positively affect student engagement, they also directly apply them to improve student performance in coursework. By borrowing Dr. Kuh's principles of common intellectual experiences and learning communities, several universities have developed structured programs that facilitate a collective group of students to enroll in shared courses and in some cases, live together. Program administrators should examine various options in design and implementation:

Considerations for Developing Peer Academic Support Programs

Participation	Administrators should consider whether all students will be placed into a program or whether they must apply to one.
Residential or and Academic	Universities that are not highly residential may structure peer support programs around shared classes, though others with on-campus housing may incorporate a residential component.
Common Theme or Disciplinary Basis	Though some programs only to assemble organize first-years into a supportive environment, others focus on a specific profession (e.g., pre-law or pre-nursing), discipline (e.g., business or foreign language), or interdisciplinary theme. This theme is reflected in shared coursework or out-of-classroom seminars, activities, or trips.
Collaboration of Involved Staff	At many institutions, all faculty and staff involved with a student cohort – such as the residence hall director, course instructors, and student development staff – meet periodically to discuss the development of the group and the needs of specific individuals. At University B , faculty assemble to coordinate common course elements and assignment deadlines. At University E , each cohort is jointly led by a student mentor, faculty member, academic advisor, and librarian.

Select Program Profiles

Learning Communities at *University E*

Students elect to join a Themed Learning Community (TLC): All students may choose to enroll in a TLC that aligns with their interests; each TLC is a non-residential cluster of courses organized around a catchy interdisciplinary theme (e.g., “Freaks, Geeks, and Cliques” which includes three courses on cultural anthropology, psychology, and basic science or “Classroom to Boardroom” which incorporates three courses on business communication, leadership, and composition). Some TLCs are designed for freshmen and include a first-year seminar on student success strategies, while others are oriented to upperclassmen. Less than 25 students compose each TLC, and University E hosts over 70 TLCs.

Assessment of TLC effectiveness: While achievement and retention statistics differ across academic term and TLC, students enrolled in a course cluster are retained at a rate five to 10 percent higher, and achieve a grade-point average about 0.2 points higher than students not enrolled, even after controlling for academic preparation.

Learning Communities at *University A*

Communities target underrepresented students: University A offers learning communities to all students, with themes such as health sciences, academic success, and service learning, but especially targets participation among low-income and first-generation college students. These communities organize first-year students into groups of about 70 to 160, which are then divided into smaller clusters of about 20 students who enroll in similar courses.

Assessment validates effectiveness: Research shows that participation in a learning community at University A is the single greatest associated factor indicating success in math and science course sequences; students who participate in learning communities also outperform all other groups academically, except honors students.

New program targets sophomores: Administrators created a sophomore-focused learning community which includes students living in on-campus residence halls and students living off campus. All enrolled students complete a common course in learning strategies, service learning, and diversity. The learning community cohort outperforms sophomore retention metrics by 20 percent.

Coordinated Class Cohorts at *University B*

Block scheduling for all first-years: During the first semester of freshman year, all students enroll in five courses with an assigned cohort; instructors meet weekly to coordinate assignments. These five courses include English composition, three general education courses, and a first-year seminar course which addresses transition to college life. In the second semester, students enroll in a second common English course and another common general education course; they also select three courses independently.

Special interest cohorts available: Students interested in pre-med, teacher education, and the performing arts, as well as prospective majors in accounting, business administration, nursing, psychology, or sociology, may request placement in a learning community targeted to their planned field of study.

Potential extension to sophomores: Contacts report that, while they discussed extending a third semester of cohort courses into the second year to expand support networks, add structure, and ensure minimum productive credit achievement, the idea was unpopular among students. A survey indicated students wanted to meet other students in their sophomore year rather than continue in the cohorts.

VI. Facilitating Major Declaration

Early and Appropriate Major Declaration

Enforce Requirements that Students Declare a Major after 45 Credit Hours

While many institutions maintain policies requiring students to declare a major after completing 45 credit hours, more stringent enforcement is becoming more common; this is primarily achieved through electronic registration systems that prohibit course selection or mandate meeting with advisors.

Major Declaration at Undergraduate Admission at *University D*

Students who apply for admission to **University D** must declare a major at the point of undergraduate admission. If they do not indicate a preference, students complete a 20-minute quiz that maps their reported interests, academic background, and other characteristics to a cluster of potential majors. Selection of a major then connects students to a portal, which displays potential four-year curriculum and the salaries of graduates of those fields. If students select a limited capacity major, they are automatically evaluated by a department representative. If they are admitted, they receive a welcome e-mail from the dean of the appropriate college; if not, they receive an e-mail from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies offering other options.

“We have turned the admission paradigm on its head – we have flipped academic advising and career advising and put those things *before* admission, instead of after.”

- Forum Interview with *University D*

Misdeclared Students a Larger Problem than Undeclared Students

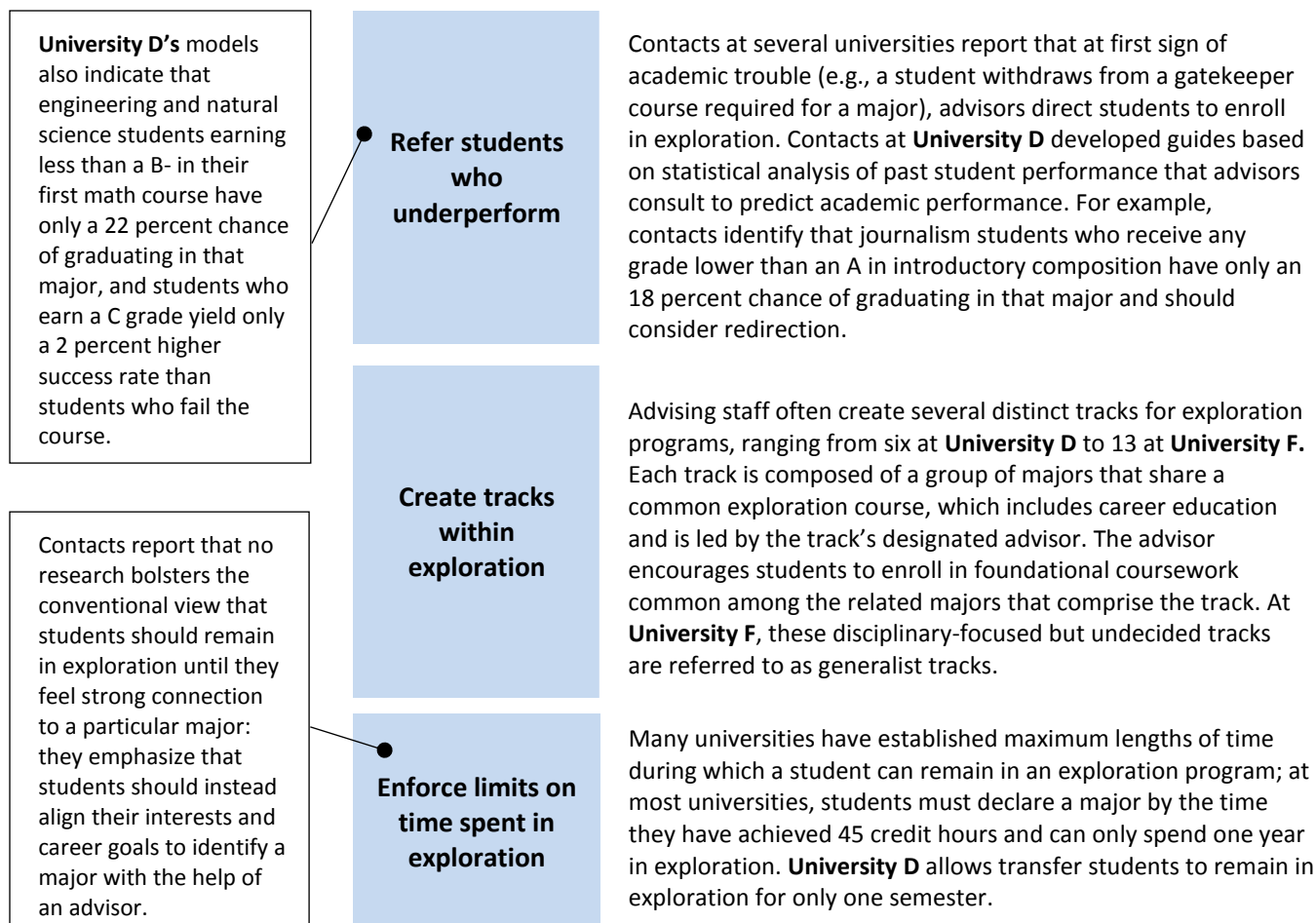
Contacts explain that although students who have not yet selected a major are at risk to not graduate on time, larger problems arise from students who change majors midway through progress toward a degree. These students’ previous credits may not apply to other majors, they may have achieved multiple failing grades and withdrawals, and they often suffer from a decreased sense of confidence and increased anxiety. To avoid students initially selecting into the wrong major, many universities promote an exploratory track for undecided students. Contacts at several institutions report they would prefer students begin in an exploration program than pursue the wrong major for the first or second year.

Exploration programs often host a much lower student-advisor ratio than major advising and guide students through a series of courses that both exposes students to academic content of interest and facilitates completion of general education courses.

“Students who come in believing they know, or their parents know, what a good fit is for them – they often flounder. But students who come in with the maturity to know that they don’t know, and receive structured advising and support – they make an informed choice and fewer errors.”

- Forum Interview

Strategies for Implementation of a Exploration Program



Host Major Fairs and Sophomore Orientations

Events that celebrate the second year can help focus student attention on major selection. These events often include the following:

- **Timed major fairs, career fairs, and department gatherings:** Administrators at one institution believe that a lack of college-going tradition among first-generation and many low-income students may inhibit them from approaching faculty members for guidance. As a result, they carefully time progressive interaction with department representatives:

Major Declaration Events at University B



- **Sophomore reorientation program:** Half of the entire sophomore class at an institution at which one contact was previously employed attended this one day summit at the beginning of the second year; the program featured information about study abroad opportunities, undergraduate research, and major declaration (though it was not held concurrently with the major fair).
- **“Getting to Year Two” conference:** **University A** hosts a summit at the conclusion of the first year during which students conceptualize and design the upcoming sophomore year, including receiving information about various co-curricular opportunities. Contacts note that it is critical to organize this retreat at the end of the freshman year to excite students about returning the following academic term.
- **Faculty dinners:** Four of the six colleges at **University A** plan open, free dinners to provide students the opportunity to interact with faculty in a casual setting and learn about various academic disciplines. Contacts add that faculty greatly enjoy these functions.

Addressing Denial from Limited-Capacity Programs

3.5 to 3.7

Average GPA of Nursing Admits

Contacts at all institutions highlight the extent to which nursing programs have become competitive, even for highly qualified applicants.

Competitive Limited-Capacity Programs Stymie Undergraduates

Most universities host programs that must limit the capacity of students who can enroll due to intensive cost, limited availability of instruction or equipment, accreditation requirements, or high student demand. These programs are often pre-professional in nature and require a dedicated application and admission process. Examples of these programs include business, nursing, engineering, and their specialty programs (e.g., **University J**'s prestigious journalism offerings). At **University J**, less than one-third of nursing applicants are admitted to study in the program. Contacts across all institutions agree that significant sophomore retention gains lie in productively redirecting students who are denied to other majors in which they can succeed.

Develop Majors and Degree Tracks to Redirect and Retain Students Denied from Pre-Professional Programs

Several institutions have created additional degree programs and major tracks that all students may select but are especially beneficial for those students rejected from limited-capacity majors.

Alternate Major Tracks at the *University J*

Bachelor of Health Sciences (B.H.S.)

Marketed towards students who are not admitted to **nursing or physical or occupational therapy programs**, the B.H.S. requires a core curriculum that qualifies students for nursing degrees at the graduate level, or in other fields such as health administration or public health. The institution also offers an accelerated post-graduate 15-month B.S.R.N. program for graduates of this bachelor's program. Since implementation four years ago, retention of pre-health students has dramatically increased. The B.H.S. major is now the fastest-growing at the institution.

B.S. in Hospitality Management, with a Focus in Sport and Sport Venue Management

Surveys and anecdotal evidence indicated that many students denied from the **business school** at the institution intended to pursue business careers related to the sports and athletics industry. After conducting market research that indicated a lack of prepared graduates in this field in the local and national market, the University created a B.S. program focused in sports and sport venue management.

Characteristics of Effective Alternate Majors and Degree Tracks

