

May 20, 2022

Recommendation to the Chancellor based on the following charge to the workgroup.

1. Inventory and assess current retention efforts and tools, and make recommendations for change, continuation, or elimination; and
2. Recommend new retention strategies that compliment current efforts.

In order to make a recommendation to the Chancellor regarding current retention efforts and tools, the Chancellor's Student Retention Workgroup utilized data from Institutional Research (IR) and an inventory of current retention efforts created by the Provost's office and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs office. The IR data was requested to help the workgroup identify students with the lowest retention rate. The retention effort inventory was reviewed to identify which initiatives were successful and which should be eliminated.

Institutional Research provided data for the most recent cohort of students (Fall 2016, 2017, and 2018), tracking the student persistence, retention, and completion rates from their 1st to 4th year. The review looked separately at Associates and Bachelors students, also separated by full-time/part-time status and key demographic areas. The data indicated that overall, part-time students retain at lower rates than full-time students. The review of key demographic areas indicated a concentrated retention effort should focus on Alaska Native students and students from rural communities. For example, the one-year retention rate for first-time full-time bachelor seeking Alaska Native students is 54%, compared to 67% for all first-time full-time bachelor seeking students. After four years, only 20% of these Alaska Native students have completed any degree, compared to 32% of all students in this group. For more information, please see the [Retention Review Report](#).

From the experiences of staff and faculty on the Workgroup, the university may also be struggling to support and retain distance/online students, perhaps especially those who are taking courses part-time and juggling other life responsibilities. The workgroup recommends further review on the retention of distance/online students, particularly part-time students in order to develop targeted support to these types of learners

Focusing retention efforts on the groups of students who are not being retained seems obvious, but does not have a simple solution. However, after reviewing the retention effort inventory, the workgroup recommends several ongoing efforts should continue, such as a robust fall orientation, and continued financial support of services that directly benefit students.

Orientation and First Year Persistence

The orientation planned for Fall 2022 will provide new students opportunities to get to know the campus and other students and engage in fun activities around the community. The workgroup recommends that new students receive information on how to check in with an advisor, check email and grades, use course syllabi and office hours, access the learning/testing center, Native and Rural Students Center, access financial aid, get help with learning disabilities, mental health or family emergencies, and make connections with groups that align with the students interests, identity, or culture.

Additionally, have activities during orientation that are geared toward LGBTQIA+ population - they can self-identify at that point. Students need to know that this is an LGBTQIA+ friendly campus and reinforce that at orientation. Have students declare pronouns from the moment they arrive on campus. Encourage faculty and staff to use pronouns and identify their pronouns at orientation, on zoom screens and on the first day of class

The workgroup recognizes that fall orientation is a significant effort by staff with a limited budget and may not be attended by all students who would benefit from participating. Therefore, the taskforce recommends that e-orientation continue to be available to students who are unable to attend an in-person orientation, such as distance, late arriving, and non-traditional students. Development of a portion of the e-orientation that incorporates opportunities for distance students to connect with each other is strongly encouraged.

The orientation should be followed-up by additional seminars throughout the academic year (open to all students) focusing on specific aspects of “being a successful student”, such as study skills, note taking, time management, etc. The Juneau campus “study hall” program conducted by the advisors is a good example of a successful program that should continue. In addition to Juneau campus efforts, Sitka is offering an online course for new students, HUM 193: Mindful Learning, that should be highly advertised to all students new to the university.

Retention Beyond the First Year

Further research into why students are not returning the second year is necessary to better understand how to improve retention at this critical point in the academic pathway.

A number of retention efforts have been tried throughout the years with some being more successful than others. This workgroup reviewed the summary of a survey from November 2021 Student Retention Taskforce and the Retention Inventory to guide recommendations for continuing specific retention efforts.

For several years faculty have participated in the Retention through Intervention program, a collaborative project between EMSA and the Provost Office. These faculty volunteers agreed to use the EAB program and to post midterm grades. Results of the program have been positive, with DFW rates decreasing in courses that participate.

Staff and Faculty Training

In addition to fall orientation and follow-up seminars for students discussed above, the taskforce recommends providing training for faculty and staff on cultural relevance and cultural safety for Alaska Native students. Since this is the group of students with the lowest retention rate, the university should put effort and resources into supporting these students through the entire first year experience.

Degree planning using Degree Works, use of EAB, and Academic Advising were areas that faculty and staff requested additional training.

An important component of the university's academic offerings is the adjunct faculty who deliver many of the entry-level required courses. These faculty members need to be included in any training that supports student success and retention.

Additional Recommendations

Student focused efforts that should be continued:

- Retention through Intervention
- First Year Experience
- OER and Library programs
- Learning Center
- Writing Center
- Sitka Start
- Sitka Student SUPPORT Specialists (Title III SUPPORT Grant)
- Mindful Learning (HUM 193) course
- New student orientation
- College & Life Skills course (Skip Downing's "On Course" is a great example)
- Email notifications
- EAB early alerts

Policies and procedures that should be implemented:

- Formalize Trauma-informed training for faculty and staff
- Cultural relevance and safety for AK Native students – formalize faculty and staff training
- Financial aid emergency funds
- Prerequisite for writing-intensive courses
- Review Drop for non-payment for inequitable outcomes
- Review Withdrawal and late enrollment for inequitable outcomes
- Reminder to students to check grades in Bb and Faculty reminder to keep up-to-date with grading
- Demystify university jargon that is a barrier especially for first-in-family students

These recommendations were created by the following workgroup members:

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