EAB

Student Completion Policy Audit

Toolkit for Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

Student Completion Policy Diagnostic

Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

This resource, organized by category, will help you determine where your institution's academic rules, regulations, and processes might create unnecessary obstacles for students. **Detailed descriptions of each policy and relevant resources are included at the listed page number**.

A small committee should review this list and evaluate the institution's approach to each policy according to its relative leniency. In order to represent all relevant areas of academic policy and planning at a high level of organizational structure, the ideal Student Completion Policy Audit committee should include the Provost, the Registrar, the head of Undergraduate Studies, and representatives from student government and the faculty senate.

Too Lenient		Best Practice		Too Strict	
Degree Planning					
Degree Plan Requirements					**4**
Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning	☐	Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor	☐	Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan	☐
Degree Milestones					**6**
Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses	☐	Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting	☐	Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course	☐
Experiential Education Requirements					**8**
Do not require experiential learning activities	☐	Integrate experiential learning into credit-bearing courses	☐	Require non-credit-bearing experiential learning activities	☐
Transfer Credit Articulation					**10**
Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit	☐	Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation	☐	Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis	☐
Accelerating Degree Progress					
Remedial Education					**12**
Allow students to complete remedial coursework any time in the first two years	☐	Enroll students with remedial needs in for-credit summer courses before the first year	☐	Require students to complete remediation before matriculating	☐
Course Load					**14**
Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term	☐	Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits	☐	Require all students to take 15 credits per term to be considered full-time	☐
Major Declaration					**16**
Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution	☐	Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree	☐	Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation	☐
Excess Credit Accumulation					**18**
Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance	☐	Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status	☐	Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements	☐

Student Completion Policy Diagnostic (cont.)

Identifying and Prioritizing Institutional Barriers to Success

Too Lenient		Best Practice		Too Strict	
Registration and Course Scheduling					
Bursar Holds					20
Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount	☐	Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register	☐	Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid	☐
Multi-term Registration					22
Allow students to register for only one academic term at a time, excluding intersession	☐	Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once	☐	Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans	☐
Course Wait Lists					24
Create a new section any time a course hits 100% fill rate to accommodate demand	☐	Override registration caps for some students until wait list reaches enrollment minimum	☐	Do not allow students to register for courses after courses reach capacity	☐
Preventing Unnecessary Withdrawals					
Early Academic Alerts					26
Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades	☐	Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe	☐	Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline	☐
Course Repeats					28
Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions	☐	Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat	☐	Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements	☐
Course and Institutional Withdrawal					30
Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction	☐	Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal	☐	Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal	☐
Academic Probation and Dismissal					32
Allow students to remain on probation indefinitely, regardless of improvement	☐	Require students on probation to reverse GPA trend to continue at the institution	☐	Dismiss students if they fail to improve academic standing after one probationary term	☐
Student Messaging and Outreach					
Student Communications					34
Allow faculty and staff to communicate with all students as frequently as desired	☐	Centrally coordinate and schedule messages to large numbers of students	☐	Require all student communications to come from one central office	☐
Student Aid Renewal					36
Do not require students to refile financial aid forms after the first year	☐	Send a series of escalating "nudges" reminding students to refile financial aid forms	☐	Use registration holds to require students to refile financial aid forms	☐
Non-registered Students					38
Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term	☐	Call students who fail to register before the deadline for unexplained reasons	☐	Automatically register students for courses using a prescriptive degree plan	☐

Degree Plan Requirements

Require First-Year Students to Create and File Degree Plans

Understanding the Problem

In order for students to graduate on time, they need a clear understanding of the optimal timing and order of graduation requirements. Course catalogs typically include a list of the credits students need to complete a degree in each major, but do not contain detail about how to build a course schedule based on these requirements. Students may also struggle with balancing a full course load with work or other responsibilities, and without a flexible plan their progress can be quickly disrupted if they are unable to secure a seat in a required course during the desired term. To account for limited advisor time, students need to be able to self-advise as much as possible in order to build an achievable and comprehensive four-year plan.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow students to register each term without any long-term degree planning

- Consideration for time-to-degree not at the forefront
- Difficult for students to determine whether they are on track to graduate and how much time is left

Best Practice

Require students to file and update an on-time degree plan with their advisor

- Degree plan should include prerequisites for the student's prospective major
- Students and advisors should review and update plans as often as once per term

Too Strict

Auto-register students for courses after creation of first-year degree plan

- Does not allow students to customize their degree plans to their individual situation, work responsibilities, study abroad, etc.

Considerations for Implementation

1

Integrate "what-if" mapping into degree planning

- Students can test scenarios, explore how different course choices would affect their plans
- Enable students to see how deviation from plan would affect time-to-degree
- Encourage students to explore majors and proactively plan for multiple alternatives

2

Mandate early completion of co-curricular requirements

- Students should complete co-curricular and distribution requirements in the first two years when possible
- Include these requirements (foreign language, writing-intensives, etc.) in degree plans and require a waiver for late completion

3

Use degree plans to predict course and program demand

- Courses that appear most frequently in student degree plans may require additional sections
- Programs with growing demand may indicate majors that must add capacity in order to admit all student applicants

Degree Plan Requirements (cont.)

Key Attributes of Next-Generation Degree Planning Tools

"What-If?" Mapping

- Students can plug in a potential major, minor, or term schedule and see the resulting time and credits needed to graduate
- **Useful for:** Students who are considering a change of major or adding a minor

Non-credit Activity Mapping

- Students can include study abroad programs, internships, and other not-for-credit activities in degree maps in order to plan schedules and workload
- **Useful for:** All undergraduate students

GPA Calculation

- Students can easily view transfer GPA as well as predicted GPA based on current term performance
- **Useful for:** Students with large amounts of credit from different sources, students trying to meet requirements for a selective major

Standard Degree Plan

Sample Schedule	Credit Hours	Milestones
Year 1: Fall Semester		
English Composition 101	3	Complete English Composition with a C or greater
Calculus 141	3	
Foreign Language	4	
Intro to Chemistry 1	3	Complete Introduction to Chemistry with a B or greater
	N/A	Meet with advisor to register for classes
Social Science 101	3	
Total hours	**16**	
Year 1: Spring Semester		
Foreign Language	4	Complete at least one semester of a foreign language by the end of the first year
Calculus 142	3	Complete Calculus 141 and 142 by the end of the first year
Intro to Chemistry 2 with lab	4	
Intro to Biology 1	4	Complete Intro to Biology 1 with a C or greater
Total hours	**15**	

Transfer Credit Articulation

- Degree maps have credit equivalencies for transfer, AP/IB, and other credit built in, so students do not need to calculate it manually
- **Useful for:** Students bringing in large amounts of credit from other sources

Exploratory Meta-Major Paths

- Students can select an "exploratory" model degree plan that recommends prerequisites for multiple major options within a subject area
- **Useful for:** Students unsure of their exact major choice, students who hope to major in a selective program

Course Substitutions

- Advisors and faculty can mark a course as "substituting" for a required credit for a student's major
- **Useful for:** Students with late-stage major changes, transfer students from out-of-state institutions

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Degree Milestones

Educate and Remind Students About Critical Course and Grade Milestones

Understanding the Problem

Students who deviate from degree plans may sometimes be able to recover on their own, but other cases, a missed course or poor academic performance can be a sign that a student needs personal academic support in order to continue toward timely graduation. These students may need remedial courses, a different major, or even financial resources, and might not proactively seek out assistance on their own. Using historical data, institutions can pinpoint these **"milestone" courses and grades** that best predict attrition risk. Then, they can create a system of incentives that encourages students to make success-focused choices, prevent excessive deviation from their planned degree pathways, and support students if they miss degree milestones.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not notify students when they miss required milestone grades or courses

- Students can continue to get off track from degree plans without advising
- No opportunity for advisors to get to know students and share resources

Best Practice

Notify students after a missed milestone and consider an advisor meeting

- Missed milestones may be a sign of bad-fit major or other potentially serious issues
- Advising time can be spent on degree mapping and creating an academic plan to meet milestones in the future

Too Strict

Require students to meet with advisor after missing a milestone grade or course

- Does not account for missed milestones due to scheduling issues, etc.
- Would create excessive workload and service bottlenecks in advising

Considerations for Implementation

1

Escalate complex student cases to specialized offices

- If students miss a grade GPA milestone, tutoring or supplemental instruction can help them remain on track
- If students are considering dropping out of the institution for personal reasons, Student Affairs staff can step in

2

Audit degree milestones before and after each term

- A pre-term registration audit reveals missing courses
- A post-term GPA audit reveals missed milestone grades
- Audits take place before and after registration periods, so missed-milestone meetings do not occur during busiest times for advisors

3

Make messages to students positive, not punitive

- Historical data and predictive analytics should be used to start and support conversations about alternative options, not to dictate certain outcomes
- Student-facing notifications should focus on future choices, not simply at-risk status

Degree Milestones (cont.)

Building Milestone-Based Degree Plans

Example Degree Plan: Natural Sciences

Sample Schedule	Credit Hours	Milestones
Year 1: Fall Semester		
English Composition 101	3	Complete English Comp with a C or greater
Calculus 141	3	
Foreign Language	4	
Intro to Chemistry	3	Complete Intro to Chemistry with a B or greater
	N/A	Meet with advisor to register for classes
Social Science 101	3	
Total hours	**16**	
Year 1: Spring Semester		
Foreign Language	4	Complete at least one semester of a foreign language by the end of the first year
Calculus 142	3	Complete Calculus 141 and 142 by the end of the first year
Intro to Chemistry 2 with lab	4	
Intro to Biology 1	4	Complete Intro to Biology 1 with a C or greater
Total hours	**15**	

Grade threshold

- Track student progress and ensure that performance is predictive of on-time completion
- Define based on historical outcomes, not major prerequisites (example: students who achieve lower than a 'C' in Intro to Biology do not typically graduate from the nursing program)

Co-curricular milestone

- Can include graduation requirements (e.g. required internship) or advisor meetings
- Recommended actions can include completing a career inventory

General education requirement

- Students should complete most general education requirements in the first two years
- Require a dean or advisor waiver to complete requirements after the recommended term

Bottleneck course

- Courses common to most students
- Encourage first- or second-year completion

Degree Plan Best Practices

'C' grades are not always predictive of overall success

Use historical student data to determine the best grade threshold; for example, students with less than a 'B' in calculus might not succeed in Engineering

Design degree plans to keep students at a full course load

Model degree plans should demonstrate a course load of 15 credits per term to encourage on-time graduation

Develop model plans that reflect common transfer pathways

Departments should consider designing a transfer-specific plan if most transfers will be missing key first-year requirements upon matriculation

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Experiential Education Requirements

Incorporate Experiential Learning Requirements into Classroom Instruction

Understanding the Problem

Experiential learning opportunities, from internships and co-ops to project-based service learning, help students connect coursework to their real-world interests and career goals and give them much-needed qualifications when they enter the workplace. But by default, high-achieving students seek out these opportunities while others are unaware of the possible options for career development. To encourage more widespread participation, institutions are beginning to experiment with mandating (typically co-curricular or extracurricular) experiential learning or career-focused activities as part of degree requirements. Without further guidance, however, students often leave these requirements until late in their academic experience (often assuming they are most useful right before entering the workplace—and missing out on an opportunity for timely exploration). Some may even put them off altogether, requiring universities to waive them or risk forcing students to delay graduation.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require experiential learning activities

- Typically means only the most-motivated students take advantage of opportunities on campus
- Leaves many students' assumptions about careers untested, and limits their career preparation

Best Practice

Integrate experiential learning into credit-bearing courses

- Incorporating business and community partners into course projects helps students directly connect coursework to real-world issues and careers
- Students do not have to consciously incorporate activities into degree planning

Too Strict

Require non-credit-bearing experiential learning activities

- Causes some students to delay graduation if they have not completed the requirement in time
- Disconnects experiential learning from students' classroom experiences

Considerations for Implementation

1

Build opportunities for reflection and narration into all experiential activities

- Studies show that experiential learning is most valuable if students reflect and connect it back to their studies and goals
- Projects, assignments, and resume workshops help students clarify the long-term meaning of their involvement

2

Equip academic and career advisors to help students explore in the first two years

- Students and advisors should discuss co-curricular major maps and career assessments
- Opportunities such as job shadowing and service learning help guide students' choice of major and are valuable early in the student lifecycle

3

Help students build a narrative around general education coursework

- Many students view general education as a disjointed "buffet" of disciplinary options
- Grouping courses around real-world topics or themes, ideally followed by a gen. ed. capstone course, helps students connect coursework to their goals

Experiential Education Requirements (cont.)

Five Ideas for Integrating Experiential Learning into the Curriculum

Idea	Description	Example
First-Year Field Experience	First-year students conduct a short-term site visit to participate in a research or industry project connected to a discipline of interest • **When:** Before the first year, often during a new student orientation • **Implementation Challenges:** Bringing students to campus early and providing housing	Western Washington University *Viking Launch*
Experiential Pathways	Students have the option to count study abroad, undergraduate research, or an internship toward their general education requirements, with faculty oversight • **When:** Any time before a student completes their general education requirements • **Implementation Challenges:** Altering gen. ed. requirements and ensuring rigor	Virginia Tech *Pathways to General Education*
Syllabus Competency Mapping	Faculty map syllabus requirements to skills chosen from a list built by career advisors • **When:** Any time • **Implementation Challenges:** Ensuring widespread adoption by faculty, helping students map skills to achievements for resume-building	Memorial University
Skills-oriented Core	Students have the option to substitute a skill- or industry-oriented track for gen. ed. courses • **When:** First two years • **Implementation Challenges:** Determining core requirements, finding course instructors	UCCS *Innovation Core*
Project-based Learning	Students work on a project for a community or business partner as part of a course • **When:** Any time • **Implementation Challenges:** Finding community partners	*(many institutions)*

Provide support for faculty in identifying and communicating with community partners

Case Study: University of Alabama Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility

- 5-6 staff members oversee database that enables communication between stakeholders (students, faculty, partners, staff)
- Use database to match faculty with community partners
- Help faculty find funding sources

The University of Alabama

Source: Western Washington University, "Viking Launch," wwu.edu/vikinglaunch; Virginia Tech, "Pathways to General Education," pathways.prov.vt.edu; EAB interviews and analysis.

Transfer Credit Articulation

Inform Students About Credit Transfer Prior to Matriculation

Understanding the Problem

Accurate degree planning requires students to know in advance how many of their courses from other institutions will be granted credit and/or count toward their degree requirements. When students are required to apply for transfer credit one course at a time, their degree maps will not accurately represent their accumulated credit and remaining credit. Transfer students also need a realistic estimate of the time and cost involved in obtaining a college degree; the more accurate the information they have when they enter the institution, the better they will be able to utilize financial aid and other support upon matriculating.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Guarantee acceptance of all previously earned college credit

- Disregards concerns about student learning outcomes
- Dilutes institutional brand if only a few credits are earned at the institution that confers a degree

Best Practice

Communicate which credits will meaningfully transfer prior to matriculation

- Transfer credit/GPA calculators allow students to plan time-to-degree before they enroll
- Proactive transcript analysis helps students determine degree cost

Too Strict

Do not guarantee any transfer credit except on a course-by-course basis

- Requires students to spend excessive time petitioning for individual credits to transfer
- Complicates degree mapping of remaining requirements

Considerations for Implementation

1

Create internal articulation process for major changes

- Inform students considering a major change about non-overlap between prerequisite course sequences for original and new major
- Provide exceptions for similar courses
- Track common exceptions and non-exceptions to inform curricular planning

2

Offer brief online courses for easier transfer

- If credit does not transfer but students have taken a course similar to a requirement, offer a brief online "catch-up" course for credit
- Use historical data to determine which courses could most benefit from an online catch-up section

3

Provide review courses for common requirements

- Transfer students whose credit is accepted may still sometimes be unable to show all prerequisite competencies needed for a major requirement (e.g. numeracy or reading)
- Online, self-paced review courses can help these students improve their grades

Transfer Credit Articulation (cont.)

Franklin University's Best-in-Class Transfer Credit Dashboard

To further improve credit evaluation transparency, four-year institutions can provide prospective transfer students with estimated credit articulation information before they apply. Franklin University's enrollment management office developed the "My Transfer Credit" tool, a web-based self-service platform that permits prospective transfer students to generate personalized credit evaluation reports and time- and cost-to-degree estimates.

Overview of Franklin University's "My Transfer Credit" Tool

1 Prospects enter current or previous institutions, courses taken, and major of interest

2 Sum transferrable credits and report general education and major-specific progress

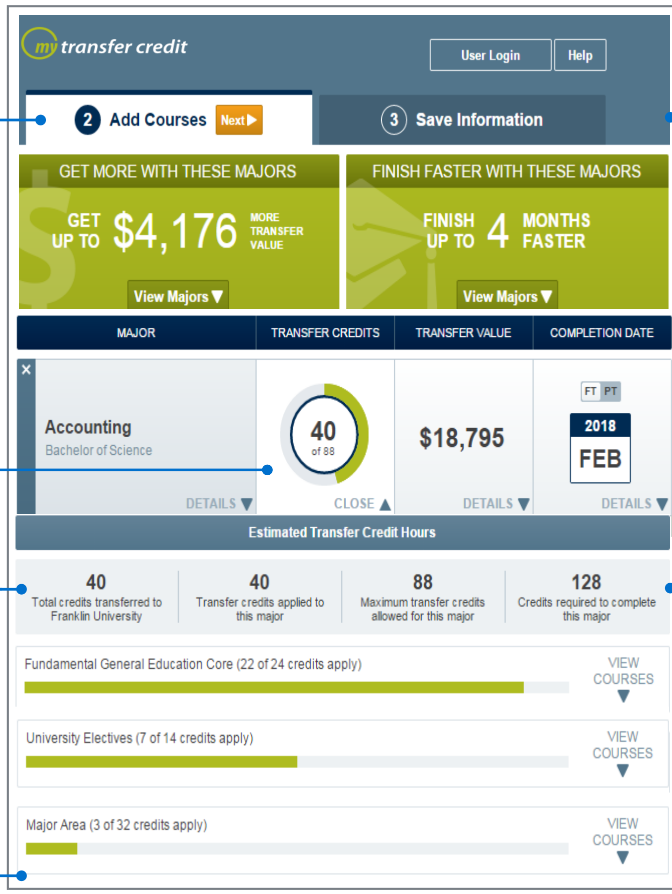


IMAGE CREDIT: FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY.

3 "Save profile" functionality tracks ongoing degree progress

4 Estimate time-to-degree to indicate required investment

5 Estimate cost-to-degree to clarify anticipated costs

6 Recommend course-corrections to save students time and money

Franklin University required few upfront investments to develop their online credit evaluation tool because it employed internal staff and an existing student information system: enrollment management staff uploaded historic credit equivalency tables and articulation agreements, and a cross-campus committee built the tool in-house over five months. These limited front-end investments positioned Franklin University to stand out to prospective transfer students—its easy-to-use online interface attracted incremental applications and enrollments and boosted yield.

Source: Franklin University, "My Transfer Credit," http://www.franklin.edu/transfer-credit-college-course-equivalency-tool; EAB interviews and analysis.

Remedial Education

Integrate Co-Requisite Remediation into Summer Early Start Coursework

Understanding the Problem

One of the greatest barriers academically at-risk students face when they arrive at college is the need to complete developmental coursework, typically in English and math. Students must complete remediation to even begin their college-level coursework—but unfortunately, despite universities' best efforts, many do not make it that far. Remedial courses have high failure rates, and students often drop out when they find they cannot complete them. Remediation slows students' progress, too. Remedial courses, while credit-bearing, do not contribute to degree requirements, so students with remedial needs take longer to graduate. Finally, and not to be ignored, is the effect of stereotype threat: students are less likely to succeed when they get the message that they are expected to struggle (for instance, if they are told they have remedial needs compared to their peers).

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✗

Allow students to complete remedial coursework any time in the first two years

- Prevents entry into almost all general education and major requirements
- Remedial courses have high failure rates and often lead to early attrition

Best Practice ✓

Enroll students with remedial needs in for-credit[1] summer courses before the first year

- Summer "early start" programs eliminate remedial needs by combining for-credit courses with academic support
- A cohort model promotes campus engagement

Too Strict ✗

Require students to complete remediation before matriculating

- Limits admission for students who would likely succeed with support
- Remedial course success rates are even lower at 2-year institutions

Considerations for Implementation

1

Position programs to students as positive, welcoming—even exclusive

- Messages to students should emphasize that early start programs are an exciting opportunity to see the campus before their peers
- Avoid language addressing remediation or student risk

2

Enroll summer cohort students in wraparound support services

- Attending advising, tutoring, and supplemental instruction as a group builds community and promotes course success
- Study skills workshops and financial counseling are also valuable for this group

3

Utilize existing courses and financial aid structures to limit costs of instruction

- Summer sections of common first-year courses are already offered at most institutions
- Students with federal aid needs can submit the prior year's FAFSA form to start their aid enrollment early

1) For a literature review on the benefits of enrolling students directly in college-level coursework, see Complete College America, "The Research Behind Corequisite Remediation," January 13, 2016.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Remedial Education (cont.)

Georgia State's Success Academy Lays a Strong Foundation for the First Year

Georgia State University's Success Academy program provides a case study of summer corequisite remediation in action. Administrators there believed that students who would typically need remediation could succeed in college-level courses with additional support. Based on a predictive risk algorithm, Georgia State now selects about 300 students per year with high school GPAs or SAT scores lower than other admitted peers. Instead of requiring them to attend developmental courses during their first year, Georgia State invites these students to arrive early and begin college-level coursework *before* their first year.

For seven weeks, students live in learning community-style residence halls and attend general education courses in the humanities alongside sophomores and juniors taking summer courses. As a group, participants attend academic advising meetings and tutoring sessions, as well as workshops on study skills, financial literacy, and adjusting to college life.

To maintain the momentum students achieve through Success Academy, participants remain in their living-learning communities for the entirety of the first year—and have achieved college GPAs and first-year retention rates well above expectations, even exceeding the Georgia State average.

300+

First-year students with academic risk factors (lower GPA or SAT score than peers)

To: Jane Student
Subject: You Are Invited!

GeorgiaState University

Summer Success Academy

Live in campus housing

Enroll Full-Time in General Education Requirements

- English (3 credits)
- Choose one: History (3 credits) or Political Science (3 credits)
- First Year Seminar (1 credit)

Attend advising, support services as a cohort

Results: Success Academy Students Off to a Strong Start

7
College-level credits completed before participants' first year

87%
First-year retention for participants, compared to GSU average of 85%

3.29
Average GPA of participants, compared to 2.5 required GPA

Source: National League of Cities, "Georgia State Summer Success Academy"; EAB interviews and analysis.

Course Load

Treat Full Course Loads (15 or More Credits) as Default, Allowing for Exceptions

Understanding the Problem

At most colleges and universities, full-time tuition rates are set at 12 credit hours per term (in a semester model), allowing students to take an additional course or two at no additional cost. Too often, faculty and advisors recommend a lighter course load to at-risk students, hoping that they will spend more time per course and develop stronger study skills. In reality, students who take fewer than 15 courses per term are likely to take longer to graduate, accumulate more loan debt, and potentially begin to disengage from the institution in favor of off-campus employment or other concerns. Changing tuition structures can potentially endanger students' financial aid and is often out of the control of academic affairs, so academic policies must create other incentives for students to take a full course load.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not intervene with students who take fewer than 15 credits per term

- Implies that students can stay full-time but take five years to graduate
- Students must take summer courses each year to graduate in four years at 12 credits per term

Best Practice

Require an advisor waiver for first-year students who take fewer than 15 credits

- Students understand that the goal is for them to graduate in four years
- Allows students with special circumstances to take 12-14 credit hours without penalty

Too Strict

Require students to take 15 credit-hours per term to be considered full-time

- Increases tuition cost and complicates financial aid eligibility policies
- Potentially harms students with a legitimate need to enroll in a lighter course load

Considerations for Implementation

1

Provide financial incentives for at-risk students

- Scholarships contingent on following 4-year graduation pledges reduce financial risk for low-income, first-generation students who may not qualify for other merit-based aid programs
- Even small financial investments can reduce attrition for these populations

2

Promote student awareness of four-year graduation

- For lower-risk students, branding and marketing a "15 to Finish" effort can increase on-time graduation rate
- Awareness campaigns should illustrate positive behaviors such as attending advisor meetings, FAFSA submission, and summer enrollment

3

Reward academic units for 120-credit degree programs

- Many degree programs require more than 120 credits, which means even full-time students cannot graduate in four years
- Consider financial or other incentives for departments to reduce excessive credit requirements

Course Load (cont.)

Best Practices and Incentives to Encourage Four-Year Graduation

1 Set Expectations

Grand Valley State University

- Advisors work together with first-year and transfer students to register for courses during orientation
- Advisors must submit an underenrollment form for students who enroll in fewer than 15 credit hours
- Provides incentive for advisors
  - Advisors previously set expectation that enrolling in fewer courses would help students succeed in each individual course
  - Adding a process step changed default advisor behavior
- Contributed to 5% increase in graduation rate (alongside other efforts to improve student success)

2 Increase Student Awareness

University of Hawaii System

- Implemented public awareness campaign
- Students taking 15 credits increased by 14.7% in one year
- Research found students' GPA increased when they took 15 credits per term
- Website language stresses that students can take "3 credits for free"; flat-rate tuition is the same for all full-time students taking 12+ credits

University of West Virginia system

- Resource folder on "15 to Finish" web portal includes talking points, logo materials, sample press release, and sample social media posts

3 Define Successful Behaviors

University of Buffalo

- Students participating in *Finish in Four* take a "graduation pledge"
  - Students agree to once-per-term advising, on-time registration, career assessment, and completion of at least 25% of their graduation plans each year
- Students are also asked to model "success behaviors" such as working at a job no more than 20 hours per week and selecting a major by the third term
- Students who change their major can participate in *Finish in Four*, but only if they will still be able to maintain a four-year graduation plan

4 Provide Financial Incentives

Portland State University

- If students meet all the requirements of Portland State's Four-Year Degree Guarantee but are unable to graduate in four years due to course non-availability, PSU will not charge them tuition for any courses needed to complete their degrees.
  - Some students may also substitute a different course for a requirement

Adams State University

- Offers $500 scholarships to students taking 30 credits per year
- Expanded flat-rate tuition to cover 12-20 credits instead of the former 12-15
- Resulted in an 11% jump in credits attempted per semester

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Major Declaration

Require Students to Declare a Major During the Second Year

Understanding the Problem

Declaring a major in the second year is associated with higher rates of persistence and graduation, yet universities rarely require students to declare a major after accumulating a particular number of credits. Institutions which require students to matriculate directly into a college often provide pre-major programs and do not require students to transition into a degree-granting program in the second year. Even more challenging is the problem of finding a best-fit major, especially when students may indicate a preference for a highly selective degree program that does not accept all applicants. Requiring early major declaration and providing a support framework for students to explore major and career options and determine best fit ensures that students will not be delayed by late-stage major choices that require significant changes to their degree plans.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require students to formally file and declare a major with the institution

- Students not encouraged or incentivized to make progress toward degree
- Late-stage major declaration may leave students missing essential requirements

Best Practice

Require students to declare a major upon earning 45-to-60 credits toward their degree

- Major declaration in the second year is associated with higher retention, graduation rates
- Allows second-year students to focus on prerequisites to gain entry into upper division

Too Strict

Require all admitted students to declare a major upon matriculation

- May undermine institution's mission, especially at liberal arts institutions
- Students may select a poor-fit major in order to meet this requirement

Considerations for Implementation

1

Require an advisor meeting for third-year major changes

- Students can change their major with minimal penalty between 0 and 90 credit hours
- Major changes should trigger an advisor meeting to go over a revised degree plan and identify urgent courses to take

2

Create alternative pathways for high-demand majors

- Students often flounder after rejection from a selective program such as engineering, business, or nursing
- Develop related alternative majors (e.g. Health Science) to provide additional options for students with these career interests

3

Design policy to support transfer students

- Many transfer students come in with more than 60 credits
- Most transfer students already know their desired major, but it may be important to enforce major declaration upon enrollment for transfers

Major Declaration (cont.)

Helping Students Find and Declare a Best-Fit Major

More important than early major declaration is that students find a major suited to their personal, academic, and career interests, so that students remain with their first major choice and do not delay graduation by changing their major after the second year. Curricular and advising practices can encourage students to explore major and career options early and identify a best-fit program.

Curricular Guardrails

First-Year Seminar in Major

St. Edward's University

- Students can elect to take an exploratory first-year course introducing them to majors
- Course is co-taught by a faculty member and advisor in designated program
  - Advisor handles transactional tasks such as sending materials to students
  - Faculty assist students in designing major pathways

Exploratory Curricular Tracks

Rhode Island College

- Undeclared students select one of five interest areas: business, humanities, science/math, social or behavioral sciences
- Each interest area has a corresponding three-semester degree map including common prerequisites for multiple majors within the interest area and mandatory advising appointments
- Students are required to declare a major before 45 credits or a hold is placed on registration

Co-curricular and Advising Support

Intensive Exploratory Major and Career Advising Program

Florida State University

- Undeclared first-year students participate in an exploratory program
- Students complete "Choosing a Major" workbook exercises such as career interest inventory
- Students visit career center and meet with representatives to learn about connections between majors and careers
- Results: 98% of students participating declare a major by the end of the first year

Co-curricular Major and Career Maps

Queen's University

- Major maps outline possible careers in multiple sectors for each major
- Year-by-year map includes recommended/required courses, advising meetings, research and internships, options for study and work abroad, career preparation
- Helps students match their interests to a major and maintain momentum toward graduation and career

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Excess Credit Accumulation

Conduct Proactive Graduation Checks for Upper-Division Students

Understanding the Problem

Students who earn enough credits to graduate may still be unable to complete due to a small number of missing requirements. Other students continue to take courses after competing graduation requirements, unaware of the potential impact on their financial aid or student loan debt. Institutions can raise graduation rates by encouraging these students toward timely graduation. Student transcript audits to determine graduation preparedness ("graduation checks") need to be performed early, and students whose graduation checks reveal potential problems should be encouraged to meet with an advisor as soon as possible.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require advising for seniors unless students request assistance

- Reduces graduation rate
- Creates student perception that delayed graduation is the norm
- Expensive for students and families to pay tuition

Best Practice

Perform graduation checks for students before reaching senior status

- Ensure that students have met requirements and do not have outstanding fees
- Graduation checks at 75 credits ensure student can plan ahead for the entire senior year

Too Strict

Automatically graduate students as soon as they meet requirements

- Does not allow students to explore areas of interest
- Can be unpalatable to students, faculty, and parents who desire greater flexibility

Considerations for Implementation

1

Institute advising holds for students with excess credits

- Create registration holds for students who have met graduation requirements but did not graduate immediately
- Consider blocking further registration if students do not submit graduation applications themselves

2

Create financial aid cutoffs as an additional incentive

- Ceasing financial aid for students after they have met all graduation requirements encourages them to graduate
- Students may view the existing financial aid cutoff as the appropriate time to graduate even if it is significantly more than 120 credit hours

3

Discourage most senior-year major changes

- Students who reach 90+ credit status should be discouraged from late-stage major changes
- Students should be permitted to change their major if they are switching to an alternative program specifically to help them graduate on time

Excess Credit Accumulation (cont.)

Targeting Graduation Outreach to Student Populations

Students with **75 or more credit hours** (approaching senior status)

Transcript Audits

- **Graduation checks:** use degree planning software to review transcripts of students nearing senior status and notify students of remaining credits needed
- **Walk-in advising support:** make it simple for students to visit advising staff at any time and receive personal advice on how to design schedules to meet requirements

Students with **120 or more credit hours** who are unable to meet major graduation requirements

Fixing Unfulfilled Requirements

- **Prior credit:** work with students to determine if they can apply credit from other institutions, AP tests, or an assignment demonstrating relevant prior learning
- **Alternative major pathways:** analyze degrees to determine if students could graduate with a change to a major with less-stringent requirements (e.g. from Nursing to Public Health)
- **Graduation fulfillment courses:** designate specific courses for these students in majors where students commonly reach senior status with missing credits
- **Summer options:** provide additional sections of bottleneck courses during summer term, targeted toward students with senior status

Students with **120 or more credit hours** who have met requirements but not graduated (super-seniors)

Incentives for Timely Graduation

- **Advising holds:** require students to meet with an advisor before registering for additional courses
- **Financial aid limit:** change financial aid cutoff to prevent super-seniors from receiving aid (e.g. from 180 credits to 150 credits)
- **Administrative graduation:** simply mail diplomas to students who meet all graduation requirements

Students with **near 120 credit hours** who have left the institution in good academic standing

Re-enrollment Outreach

- **Proactive outreach:** call students who have left the institution in good standing with near 120 credits
- **Simple re-enrollment process:** allow students to apply using a simplified form and at low or no cost
- **Active support:** provide bursar account monitoring, small scholarship grants, and regular email/phone check-ups to guide students through their final term(s)

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Bursar Holds

Institute a Minimum Dollar Amount for Registration Holds Due to Unpaid Fees

Understanding the Problem

In order to ensure that students pay their fees on time, universities often institute a registration hold for students with unpaid balances. However, most institutions do little to inform students of the process to resolve a hold, nor do they provide financial resources that could assist students with paying fees. Often, students are not even aware they have outstanding fees, because their parents have been notified but the bursar does not contact students directly. First-generation students or other high-risk students may even resort to dropping out of the institution instead. Bursar holds need not be punitive or a roadblock to graduation—they should instead represent an opportunity to support students with financial needs, creating a stronger bond with the institution and a greater likelihood of term-to-term persistence.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not institute registration holds for outstanding bursar fees, regardless of amount

- Leaves fewer student-facing incentives to pay fees on time
- Costly for universities if amount of outstanding student fees increases dramatically

Best Practice

Set a minimum bursar hold amount below which students are allowed to register

- A $100-500 threshold is recommended for allowing registration (but triggering softer intervention)
- Contact students at least two weeks before registration to ensure timely payment

Too Strict

Create a registration hold for any outstanding fee until the fee is paid

- Reduces retention rate and sense of resilience for students unable to pay fees
- Students may be unable to register for required courses due to seat caps

Considerations for Implementation

1

Provide emergency grants to at-risk students

- Small grants for students with financial risk are sufficient to reduce attrition due to bursar holds and generally cost less than they recoup in tuition
- Consider making grants contingent on good academic standing and conduct

2

Add delayed payment as forgiveness factor

- Reduce the bursar hold threshold amount for students with long-overdue fees
- Example policy:
  - Less than $2: no hold applied
  - $100 or more, more than 30 days past due: hold applied
  - $2 to $100, more than 60 days past due: hold applied

3

Encourage student use of financial literacy resources

- Include financial literacy resource information in initial email to students with outstanding bursar fees
- Recommend or require online financial literacy classes for students given emergency grants to resolve holds

Bursar Holds (cont.)

Student Outreach and Escalation Process Flowchart

1 Automatic Email to All Students with Outstanding Bursar Fees

- Two weeks before registration period
- Resolve any holds where primary issue was student awareness
- Link to online resources: FAFSA guide, budgeting help, work study

Use positive language and student's first name:
"Dear [NAME],

I noticed you have an unpaid fee of $27.50 for overdue library books. I want to help you get this hold resolved and make sure you're able to register for classes next fall. […]

If you aren't sure how to renew your FAFSA for next year, you can visit our website […]

If you have any more questions or concerns, feel free to schedule a meeting with me and we can figure out a plan to pay your fee on time.

Have a great week!

[NAME]

Your Academic Advisor"

2 Text and/or Call Unresponsive Students

- Students more likely to respond to personal text or phone call than automated email
- One staff member needed for every 200-300 students, can be student workers or other paraprofessionals

Ask questions to determine student needs:

- Were you aware of this fee? What is the best way to get in touch with you in the future?
- Did you file a FAFSA form this year?
- Do you know about our scholarship options for students in your major?
- Did you know that we provide on-campus work study opportunities for students trying to balance a job with their studies?
- Would you like to speak with someone in our Financial Aid office?

3 Refer Students with Complex Needs to Financial Aid Office

- Provide mini-grants or emergency loans to students unable to afford fee
- Open office hours when any students with outstanding payments or questions can meet with staff
- Share work-study and scholarship options with students
- Waive registration hold if appropriate

Example Micro-scholarship Policy

The financial aid office has the authority to distribute emergency micro-scholarships to students with urgent financial issues. These scholarships are treated as grant funds and do not need to be repaid.

- $1,000 or less
- Funded by small alumni donations
- Distributed on a case-by-case basis, usually for emergency relief of bursar holds
- Students who receive a scholarship participate in a brief online financial literacy course
- Scholarships are contingent on good financial aid and conduct. The number of scholarships a student has previously received will be considered

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Multi-term Registration

Allow and Encourage Students to Register for a Full Year of Courses at a Time

Understanding the Problem

Traditionally, students register for each term's courses at the end of the previous term. When students only register for one term at a time, it is easier to stop or drop out, and harder to account in advance for scheduling needs. It is also more difficult for institutions to predict course enrollment and ensure that section offerings reflect student demand. Progressive institutions are beginning to allow students to register for courses a full year in advance, encouraging them to plan ahead. Multi-term registration can significantly improve retention rates by encouraging students to plan around long-term degree progress, rather than simply next-term convenience.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow students to register for courses one term at a time, excluding intercession

- Does not encourage students to plan for the long term
- More difficult for faculty and administrators to predict needed classroom capacity in advance

Best Practice

Encourage students to register for a year (fall, spring, and summer) of courses at once

- Students can plan ahead for conflicts such as off-campus work or study abroad
- Reopen registration at the beginning of each term so that students can make changes

Too Strict

Preregister all students for courses according to prescriptive degree plans

- Significant strain on faculty, facilities planners, and registration systems
- Predictive data several years out is likely not robust and will not impact section planning choices

Considerations for Implementation

1

Pre-register students for sequential courses

- Automatically registering students for the next course in a sequence helps expedite the process
- High number of pre-registrations may highlight opportunity to reduce unnecessary three-semester course sequences

2

Reserve seats for incoming first-year students

- Multi-term registration may reduce the number of seats available to incoming first-year and transfer students
- Institutions transitioning to multi-term registration must ensure seats are reserved in common first-year courses before opening registration

3

Use data to predict section and facilities needs

- Early registration information can help predict potential high- or low-enrollment sections
- Data could be used to assign an additional instructor or find a larger classroom for courses that fill up one or two terms in advance

Multi-term Registration (cont.)

Advice on Implementation From Registration Experts

Building the Schedule

Timely Schedule Availability

- Schedules built three weeks before registration begins
- Cleveland State found little impact on faculty workload due to two-term scheduling

Prioritizing Course Offerings

- Departments encouraged to schedule courses that meet basic scheduling needs first
- Registrar's office maintains targets for essential course offerings

Increasing Student Adoption

Multi-term as Default Option

- Show all available terms on main registration page to "nudge" students toward participation
- Alter language to reinforce year-long planning

Targeted Email Outreach

- Send monthly awareness emails throughout summer and fall to students who haven't registered for additional terms

Improving Predictive Capacity

Post-requisite Audits

Audit prerequisite course progress at critical points throughout the term to reduce artificial post-requisite demand:

- Add/drop deadline
- Withdrawal deadline
- End of term

Wait lists as Forecasting Tool

Use wait lists to:

- Dynamically adjust section enrollment
- Justify additional sections
- Forecast need for additional instructors

Managing the Wait List

Responding to Seat Openings

- 24 hour window to take advantage of open seats
- If a new section of a course is opened up at a different time, a student is moved to the new wait list but also kept on the original wait list

Prerequisite Checking

- Students removed from wait lists if course prerequisite requirements not met
- Prerequisite checking is time-consuming but not substantially different from single-term registration process

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Course Wait Lists

Track Registration Wait Lists and Override Course Caps for Students in Need

Understanding the Problem

"Bottleneck" courses required for popular degree programs and general education requirements are frequently over-enrolled, causing students who need these requirements in order to graduate or apply to a selective major to delay their graduation or major declaration. Course wait list functionality allows faculty to review which courses are popular and provides a "first-come, first-served" method for reassigning seats to students that want them. However, wait lists do not typically distinguish between students with an urgent need for a required course and students who could wait another term to take the course. In order to keep students on track to graduate, faculty and academic units need access to detailed wait list data that allows them to make informed decisions about when to override enrollment caps or expand section offerings.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Create a new section any time a course hits 100% fill rate to accommodate demand

- Strains institutional capacity to provide courses
- Does not account for registration cancellations after courses begin

Best Practice

Override registration caps for some students until wait list reaches enrollment minimum

- Ensure that students with urgent degree requirements are granted seats in over-enrolled courses
- Create new sections when wait list length is equal to course enrollment minimum

Too Strict

Do not allow students to register for courses after courses reach capacity

- Leaves many classrooms underutilized after later cancellations
- Delays graduation for students competing for seats in bottleneck courses

Considerations for Implementation

1

Provide early online registration for new students

- New students compete for seats in popular courses with returners who registered a term or more earlier
- Reduce competition by providing an online option, reviewed later by advisors

2

Assign instructors to "shadow" sections of bottleneck courses

- If a course is cancelled due to low enrollment, instructors can be reassigned to a new high-enrollment course section
- Allow instructors to bypass this reassignment through a dean waiver
- Online sections can also mitigate space concerns

3

Do not impose a cap on course wait list size

- Course wait lists provide valuable information on the size of demand for a course
- Uncapped wait lists should be paired with restrictions on how many wait lists students can add themselves too

Course Wait Lists (cont.)

Priority Registration and Section Expansion Process Map

Missed Milestones

Students who have already missed a course designated as a "milestone" in their academic program are the most important population to target for priority registration.

1 Give Priority Registration — *Before spring registration period*

Super-Seniors

Students who have already completed over 120 credit-hours (or four years of instruction) are an ideal target for seat cap overrides to ensure quick graduation.

Re-enrolled Students

Re-enrolled students who did not register during the scheduled period often need seat cap overrides in order to be placed in required courses they have missed.

2 Override Seat Cap — *After spring registration period*

Transfer Students

Transfer students starting in the fall can register early through an online orientation module to minimize seat competition with returning students.

3 Provide Pre-term Registration Option — *Before fall registration period*

Over-Filled Wait List

When wait list size reaches minimum section size, add a new section of the course, taught by a faculty member whose scheduled class did not meet the minimum.

4 Open Additional Course Section — *After fall registration period*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Early Academic Alerts

Require Faculty to Flag Signs of Student Risk, but With Flexible Parameters

Understanding the Problem

Since instructors have more day-to-day contact with students than anyone else at a university, they can be leveraged to submit "early warning" alerts to advisors and student support services if a student is struggling with academic or other issues in the classroom. While these systems are an effective way to proactively reach out to students in need and offer support, they do rely on extensive faculty adoption, especially in high-enrollment, high-failure first-year courses. Faculty may be resistant to use these systems if they have no control over alert system parameters and cannot use their expertise to determine an appropriate midterm assessment deadline or "at-risk" grade threshold. Due to these concerns, advisors and support services may lose a critical opportunity to learn about student risk factors before students drop out.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not require faculty to submit early academic alerts or midterm grades

- Misses out on opportunity to intervene with some students at risk of attrition
- Faculty may avoid submitting alerts, limiting usefulness of early warning systems

Best Practice

Require instructors in critical courses to submit early alerts within a flexible timeframe

- Midterm deadline and "at-risk" grade threshold must be defined at the start of the term
- Faculty choose and prioritize resources recommended to students based on risk type

Too Strict

Mandate early alert system compliance based on a single grade threshold and deadline

- Risks losing faculty buy-in over perception of top-down mandate or mistrust of students
- May create artificial perception that successful students are at risk

Considerations for Implementation

1

Encourage formative assessment before drop date

- Midterm/assessment grades are valuable to advisors as early performance indicators
- Allowing students to assess their performance early prevents unnecessary repeats and late withdrawals
- Faculty may set their own assessment date within a range

2

Permit and encourage assistants to submit alerts

- Teaching assistants and resident assistants also have frequent contact with students and can submit alerts
- Early alerts can be included in assistant job descriptions to normalize compliance

3

Emphasize next steps, not alert status

- Students may view alerts as punitive if messaging centers around student risk status
- Alert messaging should focus on resources available to students and suggested actions for students to improve their grades

Early Academic Alerts (cont.)

Best Practices for Designing Early Alert Systems for Faculty Engagement

Make it Simple

Single Referral

Faculty given option to suggest specific response, but able to send all alerts to single office

Target High-Risk Courses and Students

Focus compliance efforts at highest-impact populations

All-Inclusive

Single system for logging academic, attendance, and behavioral alerts

Includes Assistants

Train graduate and teaching assistants to ensure coverage of introductory course sections

Address Faculty Concerns

Student Privacy

Faculty, advisors, RAs, and support staff able to submit alerts, but full access limited

Positive Messaging

Students encouraged to take clear action steps, rather than simply alerted of risk

Follow-up

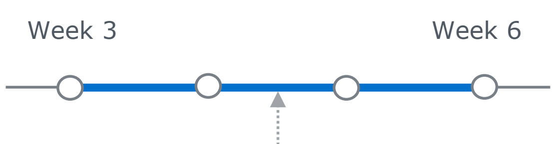
Faculty informed of alert receipt, as well as progress and resolution of cases

Flexible Faculty Role

Faculty able to decide whether and how to get involved with student issues

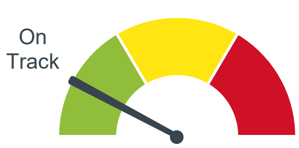
Instructor-Specific Time Window and Grade Scale Improve Adoption

Faculty asked to determine best early assessment point



Typical: Standard early grade deadline

Faculty determine examination and grade that constitutes "on track"



Typical: Single grade threshold for institution

Faculty able to choose and prioritize resources sent to students

1. Office hours
2. Supplementary instruction
3. Tutoring center
4. Departmental resource

– *Typical: Early warning office dictates response*

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Course Repeats

Limit the Number of Times a Student Can Repeat a Course Without Penalty

Understanding the Problem

Students who repeat a course two or more times are significantly less likely to graduate than their peers, because they are kept from progressing on to more advanced courses, and must spend multiple terms on the same material. These students are often overlooked by advisors if institutional policy allows them to indefinitely repeat courses. However, with appropriate intervention, students may be able to achieve passing grades in high-failure courses through use of tutoring and academic support resources. Advisors can also support students in revising degree maps to avoid excessive repeats, either by switching majors or substituting a different course.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow students to repeat courses indefinitely with no grade restrictions

- Causes students to accumulate excess credits and pay excessive tuition
- Prevents advisors from identifying poor-fit majors

Best Practice

Allow students to repeat a course once, with an option to appeal for a second repeat

- Advisors can ensure that students are aware of academic support resources
- Advisors could suggest a different course or major as an alternative, but not mandatory

Too Strict

Do not allow students to repeat courses regardless of grade or degree requirements

- Requires students to take remedial courses or change major/drop out
- Does not account for uncontrollable D/F grades due to personal reasons

Considerations for Implementation

1

Limit withdrawals allowed per student and per term

- Allowing a limited number of course withdrawals per term can decrease unnecessary repeats without getting students off track
- Example policy:
  - One withdrawal per term
  - Five total withdrawals allowed
  - Further withdrawals require waiver signed by dean

2

Calculate GPA based on most recent repeat grade

- Averaging grades in repeated courses disadvantages students who improve significantly after first year
- Use most recent grade for GPA and prerequisite calculation
- All grades should appear on transcripts to accurately reflect students' experiences

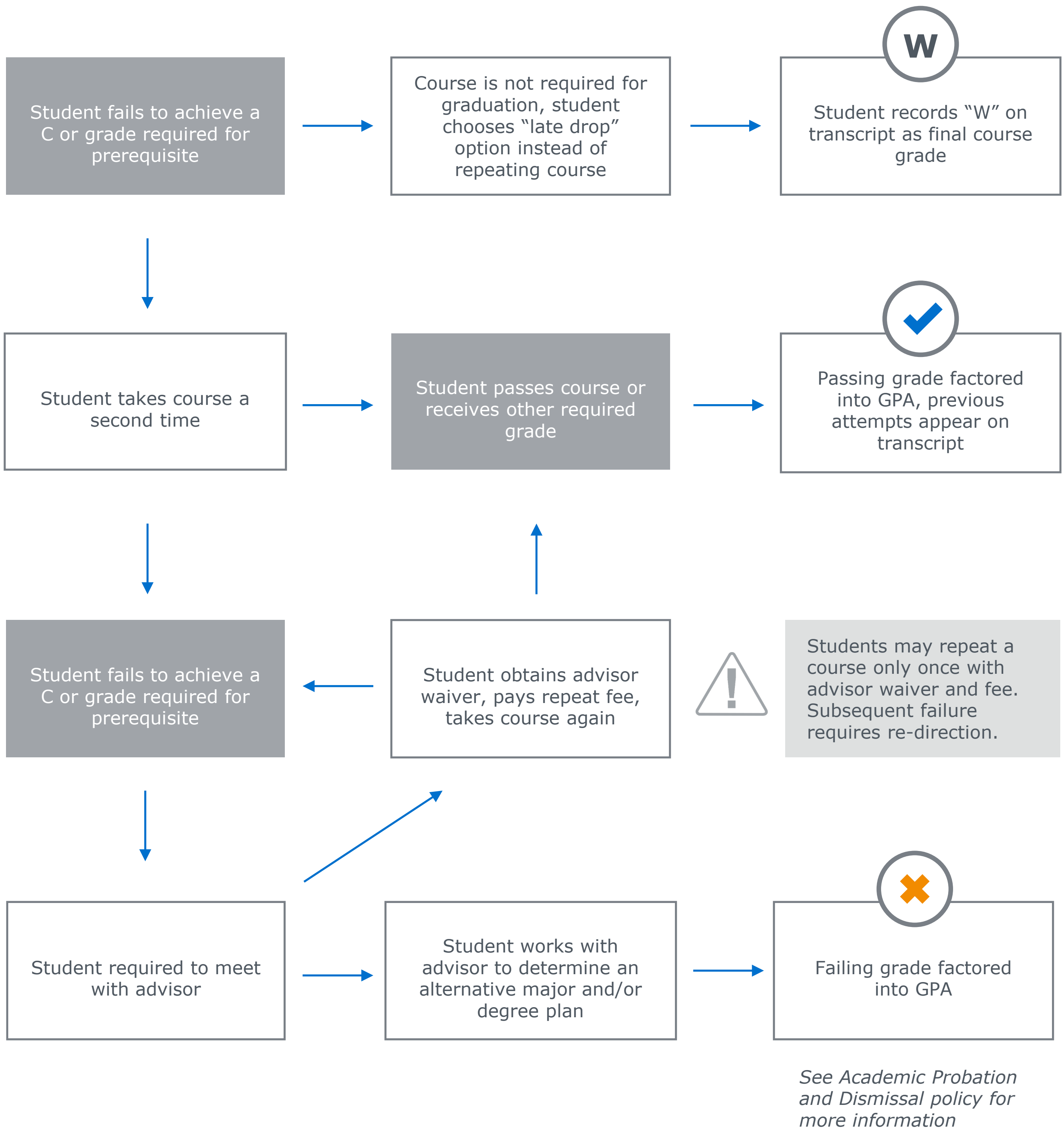
3

Institute late drop policy to reduce unnecessary repeats

- Allowing students to withdraw from one course at any time in the term can reduce unnecessary repeats to repair GPA after a failed course
- Students who change their major or degree plan to avoid a particular requirement have no incentive to take up a seat in the course

Course Repeats (cont.)

Course Repeat Process Map



Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Course and Institutional Withdrawal

Inform Students of Consequences and Resources Upon Withdrawal Request

Understanding the Problem

Preventable withdrawals are a critical opportunity for institutions to raise retention and graduation rates and ensure that students progress toward timely graduation. If it is too simple for students to withdraw from one or all courses, students may not take time to reflect on the consequences of withdrawal or take advantage of campus resources that can help them persist. Students may be unaware of academic support resources like tutoring that can help them improve grades, personal and family health options available on campus, work study opportunities, and/or major and career advising resources. Creating a common process for all student withdrawals provides an opportunity to proactively connect students with these resources and encourage them to consider all available options before deciding to withdraw.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Allow students to withdraw from courses through a simple online transaction

- Fails to take advantage of critical intervention opportunity
- Does not differentiate between different types of student needs

Best Practice ✔

Require students to complete an online advising prompt before processing a withdrawal

- Survey responses trigger prompts about resources specific to student's needs
- Discourages unnecessary transfer-out or drop-out

Too Strict ✖

Require an advisor meeting and approval before processing a withdrawal

- Does not account for necessary withdrawals
- May be overly time-consuming for advisors, faculty/deans, or other support offices

Considerations for Implementation

1

Direct withdrawing students to meet with their advisors

- Advisors can use survey data to help students develop a personalized plan to complete their degrees at the institution
- Advisors are aware of the breadth of resources available on campus and can recommend support offices to students

2

Simplify withdrawals for necessary personal reasons

- Permit students to withdraw for health or family reasons without encountering bureaucratic roadblocks
- Identify students with necessary reasons for transfer-out (e.g. desired major not offered) and allow these students to transfer seamlessly

3

Use data to better predict student attrition risk

- Common student selections in withdrawal survey suggest areas for resource expansion
- Student characteristics can help predict drop-out risk before students withdraw
- Student feedback from exit surveys can be used to improve withdrawal survey options and process

Course and Institutional Withdrawal (cont.)

Student-Facing Survey Module With Customized Recommendations

PennState

Withdrawal survey module accessible through Penn State's ELion student dashboard

1 **Student confirms desire to withdraw from institution**

- Module provides definition of withdrawal and distinction from course drop, leave of absence

2 **Student acknowledges withdrawal consequences**

- Students must view and sign off on the above consequences to continue with a withdrawal
- Also includes resources for learning consequences to veteran benefits, housing and dining options, financial aid

3 **Student selects one or more withdrawal reason(s)**

- Students can choose from 22 academic, personal, and other reasons for withdrawing
- Students select a primary reason and any number of secondary reasons

4 **Withdrawal module displays targeted recommendations**

- Based on selected withdrawal reason(s), students are given alternatives to withdrawal
- Tone of messages is positive and encouraging

5 **Student confirms withdrawal decision**

- Students must review consequences and alternatives one additional time before processing institutional withdrawal request

Sample Withdrawal Implications

- **Grades:** You will receive 'W' grade symbols for current semester courses.
- **Health Insurance:** You may become ineligible for health insurance benefits. You should contact your insurance company before withdrawing.
- **Financial Aid:** If you are receiving financial aid, you may lose some or all of your grants, loans or scholarships. You should contact the Office of Student Aid before withdrawing.
- **Previous Semester Courses:** Courses from previous semesters with deferred grades 'DF', no grades 'NG' or Research 'R' will not be affected by a withdrawal for the current semester.

Sample Withdrawal Reasons

Students will be given personalized recommendations based on the selected reasons.

- **Academic Risk:**
  - Failed a major assignment
  - Poor overall grade in course
  - Didn't meet conditions for major acceptance
- **Study and Time Management Skills**
  - Overwhelmed by course workload
  - Can't balance class with job schedule
  - Struggling with completing assignments
- **Personal or Family Health Concerns**
  - Child care needs
  - Personal or family illness
  - Feeling homesick
  - Feeling depressed or unmotivated
- **Major and Career Planning**
  - Major not a good fit
  - Unsure about career
  - Desired major not offered at institution
- **Low Campus Engagement**
  - Considering transferring to a new institution
  - Not sufficiently challenged
  - Feeling bored or socially disconnected

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Academic Probation and Dismissal

Design Probation and Dismissal Policies to Support Students With Improving GPA

Understanding the Problem

Students on academic probation or academic dismissal are statistically unlikely to graduate within six years. It is costly both for institutions to invest in supporting these students and for students to continue at an institution where they show poor academic performance. However, this trend is reversed for students who show improved academic performance from term to term. Students who are able to complete a degree at a two-year institution after being dismissed also represent an opportunity for institutions to increase their graduation rates, as these students have demonstrated ability to complete a degree and will also only take two years to graduate if taking a full course load. Policies should support and encourage these students to return to the institution.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Allow students to remain on probation indefinitely, regardless of improvement

- Students whose GPA does not improve are unlikely to complete at the institution
- May increase cost to students

Best Practice ✔

Require students on probation to reverse GPA trend to continue at the institution

- Positive GPA trend indicates likelihood of graduation
- "Clean slate" GPA policies allow students to continue their studies at a two-year institution before returning

Too Strict ✖

Dismiss students if they fail to improve academic standing after one probationary term

- Reduces institution's overall graduation rate
- Discourages students from using probation-specific resources

Considerations for Implementation

1

Allow dismissed students to take classes at any college

- 2-year degree transfer agreements should include ability to complete other needed credits at 4-year and/or distance learning institutions
- Success at another 2- or 4-year institution is a predictor of completion at the original institution

2

Focus on advising students returning from probation

- These student populations will likely need more advisor attention than other transfer students
- Advisors should focus on degree pathing as well as improving study skills, confidence, and tenacity

3

Analyze major vs. general education GPA

- Students with high performance in general education and low performance in major classes should be advised to switch majors rather than withdraw
- Advisors can target subject areas for remedial support (e.g. students with low GPA in math-heavy courses)

Academic Probation and Dismissal (cont.)

Probation and Dismissal Process Map and Implementation Guidance

Academic Probation

- Student GPA <2.0
- Student receives increased advisor monitoring, success coaching if available

Failing grades only occurred within major; general education GPA > 2.0

- Remove probationary status on condition that student changes major
- Require advisor approval for further major changes

Student GPA > 2.0 after one semester on probation

- Remove probationary status

Student GPA still <2.0 but shows positive GPA trend

- >2.0 in all classes during one term may not overcome low overall GPA
- Student must take full course load
- Student remains on probation

After three semesters

Student is unable to improve GPA

Allow dean or chair to waive probation/ dismissal conditions

- Poor academic performance may be due to personal circumstances out of student's control
- Academic units likely to err on the side of strictness, may exercise discretion in re-admitting a student who does not meet GPA requirements

Academic Dismissal

- Conditions of probation not met
- Student asked to leave the institution

Student transfers to 2-year institution and completes AA

- Treat student as 2-year transfer
- Student may choose to retain previously earned GPA or start again with a "blank" GPA and not take credits earned at 4-year institution
- Advisors should monitor these students more closely

Student returns to the institution after three or more years

- Treat student as new nontraditional learner
- Student can keep all credit from A/B/C grades earned, "clear" D/F

Probation and dismissal policies may be determined at state system level

- Many state systems have system-level "blank slate" policies for GPA of students returning to 4-year institution after completing 2-year degree

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Communications

Improve Student Experience Through Central Oversight of Email Messages

Understanding the Problem

Virtually 100% of university offices rely on email as their primary communication channel, yet despite their heavy use of the internet, students often miss out on important email messages. In a recent survey conducted by Bowling Green State University, 72% of students self-reported that they treat emails from student organizations as spam. More than half said they do not always read emails from their university or academic department, and more than a third do not always read emails from their advisors. The overwhelming amount of email students receive means students may miss critical reminders, especially if university offices fail to incorporate communications best practices. When a message about a bursar hold, registration deadline, or urgent advising appointment is indistinguishable from spam, a break in communications can disrupt student progress.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Allow faculty and staff to communicate with all students as frequently as desired

- Students feel overwhelmed by frequency of communications
- Students can't distinguish high-priority or urgent communications from other messages

Best Practice

Centrally coordinate and schedule messages to large numbers of students

- A visible central schedule helps avoid overlap between important scheduled messages
- A "gatekeeper" for messages to 200+ students helps avoid overuse of bulk email

Too Strict

Require all student communications to come from one central office

- Messaging lacks the perspective of offices or departments closest to the content
- Wastes time on oversight of messages to a small subset of students

Considerations for Implementation

1

Use a unique template to flag messages as urgent

- Emails with a different look and feel help students prioritize critical messages (weather-related closures, critical deadlines, etc.)
- Students are also open to receiving text messages for truly urgent items

2

Publicize guidelines for student communication

- As part of the email submission process, faculty and staff should view a list of email best practices and rules (anti-spam policies, security, etc.)
- Central guidelines promote transparency about gatekeeper decisions

3

Streamline pre-enrollment messages to new students

- Students often receive hundreds of emails before they even arrive on campus
- Centrally-coordinated messages and clear "to-do" checklists simplify the onboarding process

Source: Ashley Smith, "Up Front for Retention," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 24, 2017; Bowling Green State University Survey, Presented at the 2016 Information and Telecommunications Education and Research Association Conference; Rhonda Kitch, "Best Practices for Communicating Critical Messages: From a Registrar's Office to Traditional-aged College Students," A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the North Dakota State University of Agriculture and Applied Science, March 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Communications (cont.)

Best Practices for Effective Student Communication

Writing Subject Lines that Encourage Students to Click

Mixpanel Analysis of 85,637 Subject Lines

[13.5% Benchmark open rate for 1.7 billion emails]

Change in Open Rate mixpanel

+1.5%	Subject line less than 30 characters
-0.6%	Subject line more than 30 characters
+1.7%	Subject line includes a "?"
+7.5%	Subject line includes "How to…"

Catchy	Oops—you missed your registration deadline!
Direct	Concerned about your midterm grades
Urgent	URGENT: Your academic plan
Authoritative	Next steps to get you back on track
Conversational	Let's chat about Chemistry
Mysterious	You qualify for a new program!
Guiding	How to improve your GPA at the Tutoring Center
Action-oriented	Schedule some time with me this week
Questioning	Is there a reason you haven't registered yet?

Adapted from Advisory Board's Internal Guidelines

Yes, Today's Students Still Use Email:

#1 ranked communication method by students is email

40% of students say texts from colleges are excessive

Writing for Clarity, Empathy, and a Student-Centered Focus

Impersonal Copy

"Whitehouse University cares about your success and offers a number of resources for students in need of additional support. Students have found the tutoring center to be critical in improving their GPA for admission into certain selective programs."

Student-Centered Copy

"I care about your success and noticed that your math midterm grade is not up to standards for the Business School, which you want to apply for next semester. You should schedule an appointment with the tutoring center."

50% Increase in response rate (Royall recruitment campaign)

- **Reduce multisyllabic words**
  "Exempted" → "Do not need to"
- **Remove passive voice**
  "If you are contacted by your advisor" → "If your advisor contacts you"
- **Translate jargon**
  "Non-credit-bearing" → "Does not count for credit"
- **Ensure readability**
  The Gunning Fog Index is an online tool to assess the grade-level of a given text

Source: Megahan, J. "Why do people open emails?" Mixpanel Blog. July 2016; Royall and Company University Research Partners, "Communication Preferences: How to reach the next generation of college-bound students," Fall 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Aid Renewal

Remind Students to Renew Financial Aid with Student-Friendly Nudges

Understanding the Problem

Among students who leave college without intent to transfer, finances and work are students' most commonly cited reasons for stopping out. Yet a significant portion of financial aid is left on the table every year. More than $2.9 billion of federal financial aid goes unclaimed each year due to incomplete FAFSA applications, and 15-20% of Pell Grant recipients in good academic standing do not successfully refile their FAFSA. Often, students do not even know they need to refile their FAFSA past the first year. When they do, they often find the process opaque and overly complex. Jargon (is a "priority deadline" the same as a regular deadline?) and cumbersome financial forms discourage students from refiling. And they may question whether college is really right for them: Pell-eligible sophomores who fail to refile are 28% more likely to withdraw.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient ✖

Do not require students to refile financial aid forms after the first year

- Assumes students will know if they need to refile—when many are completely uncertain
- Infrequent, non-urgent reminders will not reach the neediest students

Best Practice ✔

Send a series of escalating "nudges" reminding students to refile financial aid forms

- Clear, student-friendly messages communicate urgency and walk students through refile process
- Weekly reminders to eligible students who do not refile ensure a that missed email need not equal financial attrition

Too Strict ✖

Use registration holds to require students to refile financial aid forms

- Blocks degree progress for students with legitimate reasons for delaying refile
- The connection between financial aid and registration is unclear and may confuse students

Considerations for Implementation

1

Use messaging to demystify and normalize federal aid

- Many students do not know that a large portion of their peers receive federal aid and may feel shame or confusion
- Facts about how many students receive federal aid reduce student anxiety and create gentle peer pressure to refile

2

Send refile reminders to parents of eligible students

- The FAFSA form requires significant information about parental finances
- Reminding parents keeps lines of communication open between students and their families and encourages parents to remind students

3

Draft action-oriented subject lines to increase click-through

- Students are more likely to open an email that uses personalized language, asks a question, or features a surprising data point
- Marking email as urgent helps students prioritize aid renewal

Source: ideas42, "Nudging for Success: Using behavioral science to improve the postsecondary journey," June 2016; Matross, R. & Huesman, R., "Why Did They Leave?", University of Minnesota; EAB interviews and analysis.

Student Aid Renewal (cont.)

The Anatomy of an Effective Email Nudge

Arizona State University, working together with the non-profit behavioral science organization **ideas42**, put together a series of eight weekly student aid renewal reminders. These reminder emails were designed to be student-friendly and used behavioral research from in and outside the higher education domain to encourage students to read the content and follow its recommendations. The email message below is one example.

8 messages across 8 weeks

***Sample Email:* FAFSA Myths Debunked**

Hi Alissa,

The FAFSA is now available. With FAFSA Mythbusters, we debunk three common myths and help you stay on track for the March 1 priority deadline. It could mean thousands more dollars in your financial aid package.

Myth #1: Most students don't qualify for financial aid.	**Fact #1:** Over 80% of students at ASU receive financial aid.
Myth #2: You only have to file the FAFSA once for college.	**Fact #2:** You must refile the FAFSA every year to continue receiving aid.
Myth #3: Your financial aid is always available to you, regardless of when you apply for it.	**Fact #3:** Apply by the priority deadline to get all the money you're eligible for. On average, students who apply before then get twice the amount of aid!

Dispel **common misconceptions**

Submit your application by the Sunday March 1 priority deadline.
Here's what you need to do now:

Drill in on the **task** at hand

[√] Get ASU's college code—it's 001081

[ ] **Retrieve your PIN**

[ ] **Figure out** if you need your parents' financial information

Link to relevant resources so students don't have to hunt for them

Sincerely,
Melissa Pizzo
Executive Director, Financial Aid and Scholarship Service

Send from a **specific person** so students feel comfortable responding

This email starts by dispelling common misconceptions about the FAFSA, the first being that most students don not use financial aid, when most do—a tactic known as "social norming." This message also includes a call to action, emphasizing the priority deadline, and breaks the process down into easily-accomplishable tasks rather than one large, difficult undertaking. It encourages students to talk with their parents about required financial information, and some of the other emails sent to Arizona State students include charts and graphs to help students understand the process.

As a result of the eight-week campaign, Arizona State students were 72% more likely to refile before the priority deadline (by which they would receive the maximum funding amount) if they and their parents both received the email nudges. They also received higher aid packages: between $236 and $643 more than students who did not receive nudges.

Source: ideas42, "Nudging for Success: Using behavioral science to improve the postsecondary journey," June 2016; EAB interviews and analysis.

Non-registered Students

Contact Students who Fail to Register for Classes After Registration Period Ends

Understanding the Problem

Few institutions make a concerted effort to compare semester-to-semester registration data, build a list of students that registered for zero classes, and reach out to those students to determine why they did not re-register. This population represents an often-missed chance for institutions to improve term-to-term retention. Students fail to register for preventable reasons, whether simple (a missed registration deadline) or more complex (a work conflict or personal concern). If these students are connected with campus resources soon after registration deadlines, they may be able to continue on to the next term with little interruption.

Calibrating Your Institutional Approach

Too Lenient

Do not contact students who fail to register for the next academic term

- Allows students to effectively withdraw without completing the official process
- Limits support for students who need registration help

Best Practice

Call students who fail to register before the deadline for unexplained reasons

- Recoup retention loss from students with easily-resolved registration concerns
- Students with more complex issues can be referred to advising or other campus support services

Too Strict

Automatically register students for courses using a prescriptive degree plan

- Does not allow for student choice or independence
- Creates artificial perception of course enrollment counts
- Difficult to implement in registration system

Considerations for Implementation

1

Employ student workers for initial outreach

- Student workers or other entry-level staff can make first inquiry calls to students
- One worker can contact up to 200-300 students
- Many cases are easily resolved by student workers (e.g. student was not aware of registration deadline)

2

Reach out to students missing other critical deadlines

- Non-registration and similar behaviors serve as a proxy for grit, indicating potential risk to persistence
- Example campaigns include students who did not renew the FAFSA, new students who did not pick up an ID card at orientation

3

Plan across units for year-round student monitoring

- Coordinate with staff across advising units to address specific at-risk student behaviors at appropriate times in the year
- Units can share materials, outreach strategies, student caseloads if uneven across different departments

Non-registered Students (cont.)

Re-enrollment Escalation Process Map

1 Nudge Students to Complete Required Tasks

Send a series of email and/or text reminders to students about registration deadlines

Students Do Eventually Respond to Email

35% of incoming students make tuition deposits after already receiving five email reminders

Students Prefer Text for Urgent Reminders

64% of surveyed HS students would want universities to text them about an application deadline

Example Email Nudge

Hi Jane,

As we are nearing the end of Spring Term, I noticed that you are not registered for any Fall Term courses. I wanted to remind you that the deadline for Fall Registration is coming up in two weeks, so you should register now to get your first-choice classes!

As a reminder, you can register online at this link and you can pick up to five classes to take next term. If you have any questions about registration, contact…

2 Resolve Simple Student Issues

Many unregistered students just have quick questions about the registration system or process

PROBLEM: Phone outreach often can be the rate-limiting step in campaigns

- Outreach lists can be prohibitively long
- Several calls may be needed before first connection
- Advisor time better used on more complex tasks

SOLUTION: Employ student success call center to resolve simple issues and help students register

- **6-11** Student workers
- **$8.15** Hourly pay rate
- **8** Avg. hours per week

3 Escalate Complex Cases to Professionals

- "My grades are bad and I'm scared about what will happen if I go on academic probation." → **Success Coach**
- "I decided I want to be a social worker and now I'm not sure if a Psychology major is right for me." → **Academic and Career Advising**
- "I can't afford tuition anymore. I need to focus on working this semester so I can pay for college." → **Financial Aid**
- "I saw there were three different versions of Spanish Literature 303 and I can't tell which one will let me read more works by Cervantes." → **Academic Department/ Faculty Mentor**
- "Just thinking about signing up for another term makes me feel anxious. College is overwhelming." → **Student Wellness/Mental Health Counseling**

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.